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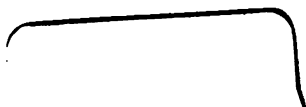
# Strange Waters

R. P. McQuillan

1984



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# STRANGE WATERS.

A Novel.

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF

"OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1878.

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# STRANGE WATERS.

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## OVERTURE. I. DEEPWEALD.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### LOCKSLEY HALL.

‘LET it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain, or hail, or fire,  
or snow—

For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go,’  
declaimed, in pompous monotone, the curate  
of St. Anselm’s.

‘Oh yes!’ exclaimed an eager voice in  
answer, ‘but wouldn’t it be ever so much  
better to make the tuck the depth of the  
hem?’

It was hot enough, more than hot enough,  
in Deepweald; but the twice-baked streets

were Arctic compared with Mrs. Swann's drawing-room, where the Reverend Reginald Gaveston, curate of St. Anselm's, would have thrown off coat, boots, and shirt-collar, had it not been for the unfortunate presence of fifteen ladies, who might make rapture easy, but comfort impossible. And he was terribly thirsty, not for the applause of his fair audience, but for one deep, fragrant draught of the cider-cup that he knew was to be found on the King's Mead, where the Deepweald eleven was playing a match of sunstroke. Reading the last new poems of the last new poet, in days when even clever people were vain of being thought to understand him, was very warm work indeed, especially when his most effective bursts were constantly being cut in two by the snip of fifteen pairs of scissors, and his most pathetic bits greeted by the maddening shriek of rent calico. But it was the cause of charity. The fifteen followers of St. Dorcas defied the heat, and the only man among them dared not complain.

'How delightfully you do read, Mr. Gaveston!' said a lady at the table. 'Much

better than William Tyler, in my opinion. You never have to put in a full stop whenever you come to three syllables. And you always do select such instructive works for perusal—yes, “the feelings” are “treacherous guides;” and then, that part about young Hall’s father being killed in the battle—that was so sad, and yet so true! Battles are horrid things.’

The curate, though far from unused to ladies’ praise, looked a little puzzled. ‘Young Hall?’

‘That was his name—wasn’t it? Locksley Hall? The young man, I mean, that was so ill-used by Amy—or was that “the individual Withers,” who comes into another line?’

‘I didn’t understand it quite like that, Miss Hayward,’ said another. ‘I fancied “the individual Withers” wasn’t meant for a man. “The individual withers and the world is more and more”—that means, the more a man shrivels up, the bigger we all grow—doesn’t it, Mr. Gaveston?’

‘Nonsense, Annie,’ said Miss Hayward, a little scornfully. ‘How can the same things

get bigger and smaller? You might as well say the hotter it gets the colder it gets—mightn't you, Mr. Gaveston?

'Ah, but it's in poetry, you see,' said another critic. 'All sorts of things happen in poetry—don't they, Mr. Gaveston?'

The curate shifted his legs and stroked his whiskers. 'Well—you see—' he said, twisting round and round the longest hair he could find in them, 'the individual isn't exactly a man—that's what it means—he's an individual. It doesn't do to look for too much meaning in poetry, you know. Of course it's all there, and you can feel it, and all that sort of thing, but there'd be no good in not writing in prose if a thing was meant to be explained. Depend upon it, if you can understand a poem right off, it isn't worth reading. That's what makes the Greeks and Romans—Homer, you know, and Virgil—the greatest poets in the world; it takes a man a dozen years of his life to make them out at all, and even then they're hard without a translation. How hot it is, to be sure! What do you think of it, Miss Swann?' he asked the daughter of the house; the youngest

in the room save one, and the prettiest save none, so far as bright rosy cheeks, bright brown hair, and the brightest and readiest of smiles could make her so.

‘Yes, it is warm. How glad you must be the meeting’s over! If I’d been you, we should have gone without our reading to-day. Isn’t there some cricket, or something of that sort, going on in the King’s Mead?’

It was hard upon the curate. It was not for the sake of reading Locksley Hall to fifteen ladies in a close room, with the thermometer ninety degrees in the shade, that he had given up the luxury of sprawling at full length on the broad turf of the King’s Mead and criticising, over a tankard of cider-cup, the play of the Deepweald eleven, with all the gusto of an old fast bowler. And now he was as good as told by the owner of the bright gray eyes for whose sake he had sacrificed himself upon the altar of St. Dorcas that he was a fool for his pains. Miss Hayward watched his face and smiled to herself.

‘How can you be so childish, Bessy?’ she said, with a superior air. ‘We have had an intellectual treat, which has been properly

appreciated ; and I'm sure reading Mr.—Mr. —Locksley is better than playing at ball with a parcel of sprouts ; they're nothing more. Please explain to us, Mr. Gaveston, if you'll be so kind, what was the Mahratta war, and where it was, and which side won. And what the young man means by saying it's better to marry savages than ladies ; “squalid savages,” he says—if it wasn't poetry I should call it disgusting. But of course if he meant what he said you would not have chosen the poem, Mr. Gaveston. Or perhaps Miss Swann will tell us about the war ?

‘Please, don't ask me,’ said the young lady mildly, and without losing for a moment her good-tempered smile. ‘I never got so far as that war. I was only in the Wars of the Roses when I left Miss Simpson's.’

‘And most appropriate, I'm sure,’ said the curate, who had himself never advanced beyond the second Punic war, and had found no time for reading, except aloud, since he had taken orders. He was not quite sure that ‘the Wars of the Roses’ was not the name of some fairy tale ; but he fancied that

he had paid a compliment in public, and coloured slightly. If not particularly wise, he was not as yet quite spoiled out of blushing by his reputation for omniscience among the ladies of Deepweald. Miss Hayward caught the faint blush and frowned.

‘Then, Bessy,’ she said, ‘you ought to be glad of the opportunity of extending your information. I am. That is the advantage of having a really clever man to read to us at our meetings——’

‘But it’s not such fun as when William Tyler reads to us,’ said another young lady. ‘He doesn’t only read all the words, but half the letters; and he makes such faces that it’s as good as a play.’

The curate had his private reasons for hating and despising Mr. William Tyler; and Miss Swann was not displeased to know why. He caressed his whiskers with renewed complacency. He knew that he never bungled at the hardest words, and was certain he never made faces; and how was he to guess that his graceful trick of stroking his whiskers had, only last week, made sport for the benefit of William Tyler?



‘And now,’ said the irrepressible Miss Hayward, ‘we are going to hear all about the Mahratta war.’

She honestly believed that the curate of St. Anselm’s was a vitalised encyclopedia, and had just tact enough to see that he had one little masculine frailty—a desire of being thought well-informed. He stroked his whiskers once more, and envied William Tyler. That admittedly ill-informed young man would have dismissed the Mahrattas as ‘Oh, a lot of niggers, don’t you know, like the Ojibbeways, that we licked, you know,’ and nobody would have thought the worse of him. But when the curate spouted

Where in wild Mahratta-battle fell my father evil starr’d,  
the line did convey a filmy idea to his brain, and he would have been amply content with his resonant mouthful had he not been called upon to ask himself, ‘What is a Mahratta?’ ‘Confound her!’ was as near his lips as the words could come without trespassing on his white choker.

‘Well,’ he began, ‘a Mahratta’s a sort of Indian.’ Suddenly he stopped, and turned

crimson to the roots of his hair. What hideous blunder could he have made to send a regular giggle round a room of Deepweald ladies who would have believed him had he told them that a Mahratta was a kangaroo? 'Surely they're Indians,' he thought, 'or can it be the name of a town?'

But he suddenly caught sight of Miss Swann's fair head bent gravely over her flannel, and a choking sound from one corner of the room relieved his mind from the thought that he had been the object of the general titter. It was a waking snore.

'Beautiful — beautiful!' said a pleasant voice from the sofa, mellow with the soft after-luncheon dreams of a stout person on a hot afternoon. 'Thank you so much, Mr. Tyler; it's so kind of you to come and keep us awake over our needles. What is it? Paradise Lost, I suppose?'

'Oh, mamma,' said Miss Swann, 'you must have been dreadfully sound asleep! It's Mr. Gaveston; and he's been reading Locksley Hall, out of the circulating library.'

'Asleep, my dear? Not a bit; I heard every word, and it was beautiful. I always

shut my eyes when I'm listening to reading. But as to sleeping out of my bed, I never do, so I can't have been doing it now. You had better ring for tea.'

If Mr. Gaveston was inclined to be in love with the daughter, he was at that moment over head and ears in love with the mother. She had saved him from Miss Hayward and her Mahrattas. He eagerly anticipated Miss Bessy in ringing the bell, and stood warming his back at the shavings in the fireplace, stroking his whiskers, and resolving to look out Mahratta in the dictionary as soon as he got home. Standing there in the midst of the fifteen ladies of Deepweald, it was hard to say whether he looked like a wolf among lambs, or a lamb among wolves. He was a handsome, what some people called an elegant, young man, with mild and regular features, who, it was said, had twice been plucked for his degree. But as this was by no means inconsistent in the feminine mind of Deepweald with his having taken the highest honours—if indeed the two terms were not synonymous—as he was really good-looking, was well-connected, was curate

of St. Anselm's, and had expectations as well as an aristocratically-flavoured name, he would have been quite perfect had not his general taste for ladies' society lately shown symptoms of concentration upon Bessy Swann. It was since this was noted that his trick of stroking his whiskers had also drawn public attention, and had become a topic of Deepweald scandal.

The round table was soon cleared of its débris of flannel and calico, and Mrs. Swann, shaking off her drowsiness, seated herself before the urn. Fifteen or sixteen people in a close room, round a kettle of boiling water, at the hottest point of a hot afternoon, was not a very refreshing experience. But neither is the House of Commons itself on a sultry summer night. Comfort must yield to duty ; and Mrs. Swann's tea-table, though but that of a land-agent's wife, was a parliament, and often a high court of justice as well.

‘Of course you are all going to the concert on Thursday week, Mrs. Swann?’ asked Miss Madox—she whose eager tongue had first welcomed the reader's finis. ‘Have you heard Lady Quorne is to be there?’

‘Indeed? Of course I should like to take Bessy very much—she is so very musical. Will it be good, Mr. Gaveston? Do you think we ought to go?’

‘Holloa, young ladies!’ said a voice from the door, which somehow, even without the aid of sight, suggested a florid man in glossy black, whose mere ‘Holloa!’ was accepted as a triumph of wit and humour. ‘What treason are you plotting now? Perhaps somebody will find me an odd corner at my own tea-table. Warm work, isn’t it, Gaveston? You’re a lucky dog, by Jupiter! but, then, you parsons have a way with you—I never had so many pretty girls all to myself all at once, I can tell you. Don’t disturb yourselves, ladies; I don’t mind a bit of tight squeezing in such company. Well, whose character’s gone now? Not mine?’

‘How can you be so ridiculous, John!’ said his wife, with beaming pride in her husband’s brilliancy. ‘I was asking Mr. Gaveston if he didn’t think we ought to go and hear—that concert in the Shire Hall, you know—I never can remember names.’

‘Barbagianni and Corbacchione,’ said Miss

Bessy fluently, 'and Ranuzza, and Katzkorff, and Clari.'

She gave the curate the slightest glance, but it was enough for his cue.

'It will be quite worth going to,' he said. 'I shall go.'

'Then so shall I,' said Miss Hayward, decisively. 'It says in the bills they're from the opera, and the best people go to the opera. It isn't like a common play.'

'I have no objection to the drama,' said the curate, 'when it is properly conducted; and then the Shire Hall is not a theatre. I have not heard about Lady Quorne; but I know, for a fact, that the Palace and the Deanery will both be there. I heard Clari once, in Exeter Hall; she is a second Malibran, they say.'

'She may be a third What's-her-name,' said Mr. Swann; 'but, though tickets don't cost much, new gowns do, as you'll find when there's a Miss Gaveston, not to speak of a Mrs.'

'I won't ask you for as much as a new ribbon; there, papa!' said Bessy.

'There's more ways of getting than asking,

Miss Bessy. What does your papa say to it all, Miss March?' he asked, turning half round to a remote corner of the room. 'If he thinks it the right thing to go, I shall feel I'm not buying two new gowns for nothing.'

It has already been said that Bessy Swann, with but one exception, was the youngest in the room. Miss March was that one exception.

She was little more than a child in looks ; noticeable for nothing but silence and the unevenness of her stitches. She was low of stature, and thin almost to meagreness ; even her clothes were awkward, and increased her general air of oddity. The complexion of her thin face was of a very pale and uniform brown, not clear, and entirely without a tint of fresher colour ; her mouth was rather too large, with flexible lips that were moderately full and still almost infantine in their curves ; her nose was slightly aquiline, and she had an exquisitely delicate pair of ears, behind which was drawn, with a desperate attempt at smoothness, a mass of hair, coarse in texture, without any gloss, and as black as a coal. Her forehead was low but broad, and

remarkably full at the temples; her brows were as black as her hair. The ladies of Deepweald must have been used to her indeed not to spend their whole afternoon in staring at such a fish out of water. But, plain and ungraceful as she was, she had one glory—her eyes: startlingly large eyes they were, of a deep golden brown, full, not of light indeed, but of a steady fire that looked incapable of either flaming up or dying down. So that even these, with all their glory, looked likely to lack the beauty of expression.

She was drinking her cup of tea, well-nigh as awkwardly as she had been sewing, when she heard herself spoken to. Everybody else always laughed or smiled when that wag, Mr. Swann, said even so much as ‘Good-morning.’ She only looked as grave as a judge as she answered at once, with less appearance of commonplace shyness than might have been looked for, and in a sweet voice, rather deep for her age:

‘I don’t know what my father says, because he has said nothing.’

‘Well, he couldn’t very well say less than



that, anyhow. A wise man, March ; he's not to be done into a new gown, I'll be bound.'

'Ah, but, Celia dear,' said Mrs. Swann, quickly, feeling that to joke about new gowns to her ill-dressed guest was for once a jest out of season, 'we know that Mr. March is a very peculiar man. Of course he'll go ; and of course you'll go with him. As a musical man, he'll want to hear—— What's her name, Bessy ?'

'Mademoiselle Clari, mamma.'

'Won't he, Mr. Gaveston ?'

'I should say so : certainly. I daresay Miss March has often heard him speak of Clari ?'

'No,' said Celia March. 'I never heard of her.'

'Never heard of Clari ?' said the curate, beginning to feel on safer ground than in the matter of the Mahrattas. 'How extraordinary—and your father a musician ! You must hear her, then. It isn't every day the greatest singer in Europe comes to Deepweald. I heard her in Exeter Hall, in something of Handel's—I forget what ; but there

was the Dead March in Saul in it, I know. She went up so high I thought she'd never have come down again; and she shook like—like—an aspen! And such a handsome woman, too——'

'Handsome is that handsome does,' said Miss Hayward. 'Those singers are not always the most respectable.'

'Well, if she's not an angel, she sings like one,' said the curate. 'And the Palace is going.'

'And Lady Quorne,' said Mrs. Swann. 'There can't be much wrong about her, if she's patronised by Mrs. Harding and Lady Quorne.'

'Thank you, papa!' said Bessy.

'For what, if you please?'

'For going to say that you're going to take tickets for mamma, and me, and you.'

'Well, that's cool! There's a lesson for bachelors, eh, Gaveston? And just as if I could spare the time to go to a singing-match on a Thursday—on a market-day! And fiddling isn't in my line. Give me a fife-and-drum band, and *The Girl I Left Behind Me*. I like a tune one can hum and keep step to.'

‘Can I be of service?’ asked the curate. ‘I will save you the trouble of taking the tickets; and I will take charge of the ladies, if you can’t spare the time.’

Miss Hayward drew herself up, and the corners of her mouth down. ‘There was something positively shocking to a well-regulated mind in the way that the Swanns were actually conspiring in public to catch poor Mr. Gaveston.’

‘And Mr. Gaveston,’ she asked, as sweetly as she could, ‘would it be asking you too great a favour to take a ticket for me? It would be so nice if we could all sit together, and be told, by somebody who knows, what we ought to admire. And you have such exquisite taste, Mr. Gaveston.’

‘Delighted, I’m sure,’ said that innocent young man, inwardly foreseeing that just three untaken places should be together, and that the only one left should be far enough away.

‘Oh you women! oh you parsons!’ said Mr. Swann. ‘I suppose you’ve managed among you all to leave me nothing to do but pay. What, is that your manners, Celia, to

go off without saying good-bye to me?' he said to that least of his guests, as she was quietly going off alone between two chattering batches of departing visitors. 'Tell your father from me—from me, mind—that you're to go to this fiddling; and if he can't find the time to take you, I'll give you a ticket, and you shall go with Mrs. Swann and Bessy. Don't say a word, my dear—give me a kiss, and that's a fair bargain. Poor girl,' he said when she had gone, 'she don't get much play from year's end to year's end. This Dorcas thing of yours is the only outing she gets, I'm afraid. March is a clever fellow, and all that, and knows his trade; the Hardings think no end of him, but he's no more fit to be the father of a growing girl than of that tea-kettle.'

'I'll take care of her of course, John, and welcome,' said his wife, 'but I do wish she wouldn't wear quite such frights of things. She's just like a scarecrow; and with the Palace, and the Quornes, and the Deanery going to be there and all, they'll think we've got poor relations. However, it will be a charity to the poor girl, as you say. And if

you find her a ticket, I daresay I can manage to give her something to go in.'

Even Miss Hayward had, at last, to leave the curate alone in the hands of the enemy without being by to protect him. He and Bessy stood talking in the window, when the girl for whom these good-natured plans were being formed passed below them on her way home.

'Isn't she a queer girl?' Miss Bessy was saying. 'I wonder what she'll ever grow into; and that fright, her father! It makes me shudder all over to look at him. Is it true he beats her? Who could her mother have been? And what things she does wear to be sure—and how she does put them on; with a pitchfork, I should say.'

'She has a sweet voice, though, and wonderful eyes.'

'Do you think so, really? They always put me in mind of saucers, and her face is so thin and small; they make her look as if she'd just had a fever.'

'I mean for eyes that are not blue,' he corrected himself, looking into Bessy's, which were gray.

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‘There was something about hazel eyes in what you were reading; “the spirit—deeply dawning—in the dark of hazel eyes—” something like that: do you call Miss March’s eyes hazel, Mr. Gaveston?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure. P’r’aps so. But what a poetic nature you have, and what a memory! And I’m quite sure yours are blue.’

## CHAPTER II.

‘ NO.’

BLUE eyes, even though not quite blue, are very charming things ; and it would be pleasant to linger with the Reverend Reginald Gaveston by the side of Bessy Swann—pleasant, because it would be undeniably dull. Dulness is better than excitement in hot weather. Nor, indeed, even by following the hazel eyes, if such they were, is it possible altogether to escape from dulness in Deepweald. It was, and is, essentially a dull place ; that must be understood at once, and distinctly remembered. Even so tame and common an event as a concert of opera-singers out of season was there an excitement.

Celia March walked, not so ungracefully

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as she sat, along the close and sultry lane where the very bricks seemed to perspire, crossed the deserted Fore Street, and then turned—always walking as quickly as if it were mid-winter—into an ancient paved court with projecting storeys to its houses and a blackened ecclesiastical gateway at one end. This led her into the gravelled close whence uprose the pride, heart, and glory of Deepweald—its great gray cathedral, now rosy with the sunset. Round it wheeled a congregation of rooks, cawing their vespers before settling down to sleep among the turrets of another cathedral hard by—the elms. Nothing would please me better than to pause before this first sight of Deepweald Cathedral from the gate in College-yard, and examine one by one its venerable beauties, unprofaned as yet by a suggestion of restoration ; for this was no Gothic matron flaunting in the fashion of eighteen. But Celia did not pause. Her hazel eyes had seen all that before ; and would have grown even larger than they were, if possible, had she been told that the great church was more noteworthy than the light and the air.



She crossed the close, entered the south porch under the row of the twelve Apostles whom some follower of Cromwell had beheaded after the siege, passed up the nave, and came to a stand at last by the choir-screen under the organ. No service was going on, but the organ was nevertheless filling the church with its music—loud, strong music, with defiance and triumph in it, as if a giant were at work and doing his best for the benefit of one fat verger who was not listening. Nor did Celia listen—people who have lived all their lives by the seashore do not listen to the sea. This also was part of her atmosphere.

At last, after half-an-hour's playing, the giant ceased. The door of the loft opened and there appeared—if not a dwarf, yet one who might be called so by others than recruiting-sergeants for the Life Guards. He was barely over five feet in height, though otherwise stoutly and broadly made. It was not that he looked stunted; it was as if a strong and massively-made man had been compressed in every direction, to the advantage of vigour, and with but little loss of

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proportion. A much worse point about him than want of height was that his children, if he had any who took after him, had a very ugly father; and through his whole appearance there ran a prophetic likeness of Celia in this undersized man of uncertain middle age, with his square, sallow face and its harsh, angular jawbones. His mouth, like hers, was large, though neither sweet nor mobile; his nose and chin, like hers, were well pronounced, and something more. His thin hair was part coal-black, part iron-gray—it must once have been like hers; his forehead was like hers in lowness, breadth, and fulness at the temples—unlike only in being rough and deeply furrowed between the brows—her brows, only exaggerated into shagginess. He had not her eyes, however; his were gray, deepset, dull, and small. It was a rugged and inharmonious face, utterly fixed in gravity, well-nigh repulsive, but full of narrow power—the face of a man who sees but one point before him, drives on to it, and probably gets there; but who, if getting there be impossible, drives on all the same. It was not hard to understand, at second sight, how

under the hands belonging to such a face a machine should have been inspired with a soul ; but it was impossible to guess how a master of this sort had come to be buried alive in Deepweald. Unless indeed in his sombre, sallow, masterful face the spirit of the old cathedral was incarnate—he looked not only middle-aged but mediæval.

He nodded to Celia without a smile or a word, nor did she say a word to him. Not that she walked beside him in awe, though so quietly ; her air of shyness had left her altogether, and her face looked softer by far than at Mrs. Swann's. Crossing the close under the elms, with the rooks cawing overhead, the perfect peace in all the air that old churches breathe must have fallen even upon her dull life like a pleasant dream, without the hope, and therefore without the fear, of its being one whereto waking must come sooner or later, but surely some day.

The organist's official residence was a red-brick house exactly opposite the cathedral tower, which was seen from its front windows through and above the elms. Outwardly, the house was pleasant-looking enough, in

the style that makes us fancy every now and then that Queen Anne is not dead, whatever the newspapers may say. But the inside only too plainly betrayed that Celia March was no better as a housekeeper than as a seamstress. The very passage warned all who disliked dust and darkness not to enter farther.

It was a large house, with many rooms ; but the ground-floor parlour proved, by its signs of constant occupation for all purposes, that a two or three roomed cottage would have amply sufficed for these two. The prevalent atmosphere was of tobacco, with an undertone of breakfast and dinner. Mrs. Swann's drawing-room had been a far pleasanter corner for a hot evening. The whole centre of the room, however, was taken up, not by the suggested dinner-table, but by a grand piano, for whose sake all other space had been left to shift for itself anyhow and anywhere. Not far from it, in the least ill-lighted spot, was a desk-table that seemed to have been written to pieces. But the room in general was given over to an Augean litter of books and music, both bound and

unbound, white and yellow, whole and torn, printed and written. These covered the chairs, were piled up in the corners ceiling high, lay under the piano; even in the fender and over the floor, so as to make the pattern of the carpet only dimly imaginable. The rest of the furniture consisted of a long pipe with a china bowl, a tobacco-jar of red lava, an antique lamp, a small-sword, an ink-bottle, some stumps of quill pens, a cruet-stand, and an engraved portrait of Palestrina. Mr. March threw some music-books out of a very large arm-chair upon the floor, pulled off his boots and tossed them under the piano, and sat down—still without a word. Celia filled the china bowl from the lava jar, gave it to her father, and sat in the window with a book in her hand upside down. In fact, she was doing what she very seldom did—she was thinking.

Her father, the organist of Deepweald Cathedral, made the larger part of his income, such as it was, by teaching music to those who afterwards developed into Miss Haywards and Miss Swanns. Nor can it be said with any justice that John March's

pupils, the ladies of Deepweald, played or sang one whit better than the ladies of any other country town. Wonderfully inconsistent with his look and manner, and with his Titanic style of organ-playing, was his indulgence as a teacher. The worse his pupils performed, the less he used to scold them, and he was never known to complain of missed lessons or negligent practice. But one serious rebuke of his is on record; and that was, "Never let me hear you play like that again. Play as ill as you like; but very nearly well is enough to madden Job."

So he satisfied everybody; his pupils, because he never asked them for time or tune, and their parents, because he never asked them for money, but let them pay him much, or little, or nothing, just as and when they pleased. It was lucky for him that he had no rival, and that Deepweald was on the whole an honest town. But Celia's experiences of her father's system were of a very different kind.

Without playmates, or even acquaintances, she had been left to tumble up as she best could; as soon as she was old enough to com-

pare her destiny with that of other children she could not help feeling that it was positive dislike, rather than negative indifference, that made her father neglect her so completely. But one day it happened that, as she was amusing herself with mimicking on an old spinet the false notes and hobbling scales of Miss Bessy Swann, her father's worst and therefore favourite pupil, she felt her hands tightly grasped from behind her, and herself trembling at the words, 'To know what is wrong is to feel what is right. To-morrow *you* will begin.'

And from that to-morrow began what was not life, but slavery. She learned the first seven letters of the alphabet, and never guessed, till long afterwards, that it does not end with G. She could count bars before she could add two to two. She was up and at work before the sun, and only the impossibility of keeping her eyes open longer put an end to days that are hideous to think of, seeing that they were a child's. Her reason was left to take care of itself, but her memory was unmercifully strained. Her baby fingers used to come out of joint with stretching, and

with forcing down purposely stiffened keys; but her father set the joints again, and made her 'play' on. He contrived, with strings, weights, and pulleys, what would well have passed in the Tower of London for an instrument of torture, so that she might not be idle when his happier pupils occupied the piano. He appeared to be insanely bent upon making his only child a slave, a rebel, or an idiot, or else a music-hater for all her days.

They say that canaries and nightingales sing the louder and sweeter for cages and cruelty. If that be true, Celia must have had a bird's soul. The closer she was caged, the more cruelly she was tortured, the more loudly and sweetly her spirit seemed to sing, till the child's voice became the girl's, and she could sing not only with her heart, but with her tongue. And that made things all the worse for her—in the culture of the great gift Heaven had given her, her father seemed to think it sacrilege to lose an hour.

'If it is genius, it will live through all,' said he. 'If it is only talent it had better die. We must work on, and see.'



Not only was music a reality to her, but the only reality. Nor did she regard it as in anywise sublime. She had never read or heard a word of the transcendental—say, rubbish, for the sake of not being contemptuous—that people in general try to make others think they feel about music ; it was just as common a thing to her as the presence of the cathedral. Everything was bound up with it, and was of it ; the close and the river, the scent of stocks and mignonette in the cathedral garden, the cawing of the rooks, the great gray tower itself, the east window and the elms—all the varied harmonies that rain, snow and sunshine drew from the dead organ-pipes of her native town. Of programmes, and the names of the people that figure in them, she was more profoundly ignorant than Miss Hayward of Indian history. She could not, of course, help being aware that something which was not music was being ground on barrel-organs, vamped by German bands, and strummed or warbled by her father's pupils ; but music, she grew up to believe, was a lost art, and had died with Cimarosa. She hardly knew the name

of any later composer, and had never heard a voice in song but her own ; for of course she knew that what her father's pupils did was not singing.

No wonder that she had grown up plain and awkward, and different, even in complexion and feature, from the round, rosy faces that belonged to the general family likeness of Deepweald. And no wonder also that her heart gave a bound when she heard that here, even in Deepweald itself, was to be heard, in eight short days, the greatest singer that the whole world contained ; which to her meant something infinitely higher than the mayor, or the dean, or the bishop himself, or even the judges of assize. She had never heard a woman sing, and now she herself, with her own ears, was to hear the greatest in all the world. No wonder she held her book upside down.

But she kept her father in view ; and, when he had removed his pipe from his lips exactly seven times, she said :

' May I ask you something ?'

It was inevitable that the odd sort of intercourse between these two should result in

many oddities of detail—one of which was that she never called her father 'Father' or even 'Papa,' as the other Deepweald girls called theirs.

'Well ?'

It was the first word he had spoken ; and it came from an inflexible voice, harsh but yet clear, and of startling depth and volume.

'I was at the Swanns' Dorcas to-day. They want me to go to the concert with them. May I ?'

'They haven't been daring to ask you to sing for them ?'

'Me ?'

'They're capable of it—they used to try to get me for their fooleries when I first came down. Yes—you may go if you like ; it's right you should see for once what people call music now ; and what volumes of cant, and conceit, and idiocy can be crammed into one word—amateur. You'll never want to go again.'

'But this is not a concert for the schools. It is to hear the greatest singer in all the world.'

'Indeed ? I should hardly think the

greatest singer in all the world is likely to come out of the churchyard to throw pearls before Deepweald. Who says he is coming ?

'Mr. Gaveston. And it is She.'

'Oh, if the Reverend Reginald Gaveston says so ! Who is She ? Not that I'm likely to be much the wiser for being told. I don't trouble myself about parentheses—things and people that just fill up the gap between what has been and what is to be. However, since it's not a school affair, I have changed my mind. You must not go.'

'Not go—not to hear—why ?'

'Bring me my score.'

He moved to the writing-table. It had lately become part of his system to make her rest two hours a day, and to let her attend the Dorcas meetings, where music was against the rules, by way of social recreation. He also rested on Sundays, at odd moments of the day and for many hours of the night ; and his recreation invariably took the form of working hard, every spare instant, at a long composition that ever seemed to grow farther from completion. What else it was she knew not ; but 'Bring me my score' had been, for

the last twelve years, a regular household form. To-day, however, slave though she was to this tyrant of tyrants, she could not help lingering as she brought him that well-known pile of music-paper, all scrawled, blotted, and smeared as if intended to be incomprehensible.

‘But,’ she said, hesitatingly, ‘if you have never heard her—perhaps——’

‘Celia!’

There was no perceptible change in his voice; and yet it made the girl feel that she had been guilty of her first act of rebellion. Gossip was wrong when it charged him with beating her; he had no need of any rods but his voice and his frown.

‘I only meant,’ she said quickly, ‘who is Mademoiselle Clari?’

‘Who?’

She looked up in amazement as she laid the manuscript on the table. A first surprise was added to her experience. Never before in all her life had she heard a change in her father’s deep and measured tones; and now there was a change, startling and incomprehensible.

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'Who, do you say,' he repeated, more calmly but far more sternly, 'is coming to sing in Deepweald?'

'Mademoiselle Clari.'

He rose up; and, forgetting even his score, began to walk quickly up and down among the litter of the room. To see this small and strange-looking man kicking to right and left the books and sheets of paper that came in his way at every step, as he paced up and down like an enraged bear, may have been a comic sight in itself; and yet it could have made nobody smile. Even what was most grotesque about John March bore an air of grim dignity—through all his eccentricities and mysteries it was plain, well-nigh pathetically plain, that the man himself was as simple and as real as a man can be.

'You shall not hear her—not till you can defy her! Listen to me, Celia. You are sixteen years old; and it is part of my plan that at sixteen you should no longer be a child. You have just asked me why—I will answer you. Music is dead, and it is I who must restore it, and you. I must, because no one else will; you, because none else can.

And there is only one way. A perfect work must be written, so perfect as to be beyond the reach of any but the most perfect singer, and to serve as the test and standard of perfect singing for ever. And it must be sung with such absolute perfection that the whole world shall kneel down before triumphant art, and never tolerate again the wares of hucksters and charlatans—the clap-trap of the music-sellers and the impostures and buffooneries of that arch music-shop, the opera. The money-changers must be scourged from the temple. The call came to me when I was hardly older than you. It took me ten years to fit myself for such a work by study; ten more to settle its form and subject. It will be finished when it is finished, and not a day before. But all would be thrown away without her who is to make it live for the world. I—I once thought I had found her; but I was wrong. But I worked on; Heaven does not inspire the end without giving the means. You are to be the means, Celia. I have kept you pure. I have devoted you to the glory of Art in the world. Here, in Deepweald, you have never



heard a note that was false of music that was not true, except to hate it as a sin. You have had no distractions; you have been brought up by the mother of Genius, who is Solitude. You have been taught as Porpora himself would have taught you. And now—you wish to hear Clari—Mademoiselle Clari !

Poor Celia ! She had music in her heart, but she could not understand one single word.

'She is the enemy, Celia ! It is against her, and such as she, that we have to do battle. She is the arch-type of those who leap at once from the shop to the stage, and carry their wretched souls with them. She sings for diamonds, and gives the trash they want to the fools who will give diamonds for trash, written by charlatans and sung by the paid agents of charlatans. Yes ; the Reverend Reginald is right ; she is the best, the very best singer, in all the—world !'

Celia was more bewildered than ever ; the fierce sneer that accompanied the word 'world' was thrown away. But something like the phantom of imagination had nevertheless been set working in her. She had heard, in



church, of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and, as she knew of no morals apart from music, she must assume that all the three were centred in Mademoiselle Clari. And that meant—fascination.

The peal of St. Anselm's rang on its six bells, as if they were syllables, 'Ma-de-moi-selle Cla-ri.' The clock on the chimney-piece ticked 'Ma-de-moi-selle Cla-ri.' The rooks in the elms cawed with persistent energy, 'Cla-ri, Cla-ri.' The whole air grew vocal with that mystical name. And all Deepweald would soon hear, not only the name, but the most beautiful song in all the world—Celia's own father had owned the beauty, even while he preached against the sin. And the most longing ears in all Deepweald were the only ears forbidden to hear. What could her father mean? What sin against art could there possibly be in hearing the greatest singer in the world? Of course he was always right and always wise, and she never recognised tyranny because she had never felt freedom. But—once more for the first time in her life—she dimly guessed that the cathedral close was not the world.


The organ at evening service pealed out ‘Clari.’ The forbidden name had magnetised the air. She caught herself wondering whether the dean, the mayor, the bluecoat boys, and the fat verger were also tormented by Mademoiselle Clari, or whether the organ thus spoke to her only.

She rose even earlier than usual next morning, that she might read Clari’s name on the posters that leaned against the railings of the Shire Hall. There they all were, in scarlet letters — Barbagianni, Corbacchione, Ranuzza, Katzkorff—CLARI in letters doubly large. She touched the board with her finger-tips, and ran home before the Fore-street had thought of waking. So far she had done no harm; but all through to-day her heart was with Thursday, and with the siren whom it was a sin to hear.

## CHAPTER III.

### PARADISE AND THE PERI.

How does a needle feel under the force of a magnet through a thin but impenetrable barrier? Very much, probably, like Celia March on Thursday afternoon. She was drawn by Mademoiselle Clari with magnetic force; but between them stood her father's 'No.' She had not one thought of the remotest possibility of disobedience, but a burning restlessness drove her to approach the magnet as near as the barrier allowed. So it happened that at two o'clock she was walking—by one of those accidents which are not accidental—along the Fore-street past the Shire Hall. She passed the building twice; and then, remembering that it was against the whole



Deepweald code of propriety for a young lady to promenade the Fore-street alone after marketing hours, turned into a draper's shop at the corner of College-yard—another accident of the same sort, which gave her an excellent post for seeing the audience arrive. Here she stood, a Peri at the gate, to watch the happier souls pass into their sinful beatitude. Nay, she felt even more forlorn than the Peri; her longing surpassed even what Bessy Swann would have felt had she been forbidden to go to a dance at the Deanery.

‘Of course you are going to hear the singing, Miss March?’ asked the girl at the counter. ‘I wish I could go too—Lady Quorne and Mrs. Harding are to be there, so it must be something particular. What can I serve you with to-day?’

Celia was ashamed to say she was not going, and sympathised intensely with what she took for granted must be the fellow feelings of her sister-sufferer.

‘No—yes—I want a pair of gloves, please,’ she said; which was true. For she had come out without gloves, and her hands, thanks to her father's system of manual training,

were not beautiful enough to dispense with them.

‘Primrose, of course, like Lady Quorne? She always wears primrose; and I’ve sold three dozen pair this very morning. Ah, if there isn’t her very carriage! and she’s in it her own self—think of that, now!’

The young lady threw down her stock of gloves on the counter and hurried to the shop-door.

‘But whose carriage is that?’ she said, yet more excitedly. ‘Why, it’s—no, it isn’t—yes—no—yes—if it isn’t the Marchioness! Well, you are in luck’s way, Miss March. You’ll be in the very same room with the Marchioness and can look at her all the time. Well, I do envy you—fancy that, now!’

Celia looked, and saw a large close carriage drawn by two large gray horses: and—for she was unable to help learning something at the Dorcas meetings—was by no means unimpressed by the fact that the glory of Mademoiselle Clari had drawn all the way to Deepweald a stout, middle-aged, and highly-respectable lady of retired habits, who was not seen in the town once in three years.

The quiet, sleepy old city seemed to have grown metropolitan for the hour ; and what must this Mademoiselle Clari be, who had roused it up even more effectually than the high-sheriff's trumpeters at assize time ?

She took the gloves, paid for them, and went into the street again—not down the yard as she ought to have done. Not only was she still drawn towards the Shire Hall, but she was ashamed, in sight of the glove-girl, to go in any other direction. The shy dread of being thought singular is no evidence of moral cowardice at her age. A little crowd formed a lane across the pavement, to watch the great people as they left their carriages. Celia could not, of course, stand among the crowd, so she followed some strangers—for there were not a few county people in Deepweald to-day—up the steps and into the vestibule.

Miss Madox passed her with a nod, which made her so ashamed of her meaningless presence in the vestibule and of the incongruity of her dress with the most brilliant toilette-show ever seen in Deepweald, that she shrank into a dark corner behind the

temporary ticket-office, there to wait for the way home to be clear again.

Most of the company passed straight on ; scarcely any had put off ticket-buying till the last moment. At last, however, the vestibule was empty, and she had nothing to do but walk out boldly from her corner and go straight home without fear of being seen by the most prying eyes in all the town.

‘ Give me a ticket, please,’ she suddenly heard spoken from just in front of the official pigeon-hole.

Well might she start to hear it — the voice was her own ! The young man at the pigeon-hole did not faint on the spot at this outrageous piece of reckless and audacious rebellion. He was a stranger to the city ; so he just looked at her dress, and said :

‘ Shilling ?’

‘ Yes,’ she panted out. She could not turn back now ; the deed was done. The man gave her the ticket ; she felt for her money, and found that the purchase of her primrose gloves had left her exactly the sum of five-pence halfpenny.

She had been guilty of the hitherto un-

imaginable sin of disobedience, and had been guilty in vain. She had sinned, and had not even grasped the passing delight of the sin. Nobody who has ever been in the like case will wonder at her next proceeding. She was but a child, and it was too hard. She suddenly felt a round ball in her throat, and burst into tears.

‘Allo ! Vat is all dis ?’ said a sharp voice behind her. ‘Vy veep you, eh ? Vat have you here ?’

She glanced up, though wishing that the pavement would swallow up herself, her sin, and her shame, and saw before her a fat, clean-shaven foreigner in a furred cloak and eccentric hat, with many-ringed red hands, coarsely humorous lips, and a pair of amazingly quick and ill-tempered gray eyes. With those he was staring at her hard, and each stare felt like a flash of lightning.

‘Aha ! Siete Italiana ?’ he asked her. ‘No ? Then how dare you have two big eyes like that and a skin like to café au lait ? Vy veep you, eh ?’ he said again, with a short impatient stamp. ‘Is it that you are a post or a fish, Mademoiselle ?’



‘The young lady couldn’t pay for her ticket, sir,’ said the young man at the pigeon-hole.

‘I—I wanted to hear Mademoiselle Clari, sir,’ stammered Celia as well as she could.

‘And—I suppose I was vexed—that’s all.’

‘Aha? Excellent! You cry to hear la Clari! Zat shall go ze round of paper—zat shall be in ze Times, zat a young lady cry because she cannot hear la Clari! Yes, so sure as I am Prosper! Mademoiselle, I zank you zat you cry so well. It is an aver-tissement—vat you call a pouff! Oh, yes, you shall hear la Clari; you pay by your veeps, your dears. She will love to hear she have made you cry. Come—you shall follow me.’

‘No—sir—please!’ she was beginning; longing, honestly at last, to run away, and yet unable to move.

‘But I say you shall!’ he said, angrily. ‘I am master here. La Clari herself dares not say no to Prosper. If you shall not come, I shall make you veep again—you comprehend? Vipe up your veep, and—hark, zey begin! Come.’

As he spoke, her ears just caught the far-


off echo of a violin ; she followed—what else was a timid girl to do ? Her guide almost thrust her into a seat at the back of the gallery, out of sight ; for her appearance was by no means such as to ornament the room. She was too much distressed at first to realise what was going on ; but presently a rattle of the ferules of parasols on the floor woke an echo in her. She ventured to look between the two heads immediately in front and saw, standing at the edge of the platform, one whom she knew at once, without being told, to be Mademoiselle Clari.



## CHAPTER IV.

### CLARI SINGS.

BUT it was more than the Mademoiselle Clari of her invisible dreams—the Clari whom the bells had chimed, the organ pealed, the clock ticked, and the rooks cawed. She saw—and it is with Celia's eyes, be it remembered, not our own, that we also see—a real queen, with the features of a real goddess made of cream and crimson roses, as young as she was lovely, and with golden hair, like a saint's glory in the east window of the cathedral. Her large eyes, indeed, being of dark-brown, matched neither her hair nor her complexion, apart from the sanction of fashion; but this was only a piquant discord that seemed to give character. Her costume, Celia felt, was



equally effective — a tragic robe of black velvet and very old lace, set with sparkling lights that might be diamonds if they were not stars. Immediately in front of her, below the platform, sat the Marchioness of Horchester and the Countess of Quorne; but, great ladies as they really were, semi-regal as they were in Deepweald, Celia thought them but very poor specimens of earthly grandeur beside the royalty that streamed from Mademoiselle Clari; a proud smile, thought Celia, but as sweet as it was proud. In the beauty of the sight she forgot to expect the song.

But the song came, and straightway Celia's soul was carried away into a new world. The composer of this, we may be sure, had cared nothing for the old and extinct maëstri whom John March ranked among the prophets and apostles. This was music such as the living world loves, and Celia was thrown at once into passionate sympathy with all the world. She only felt that it was beautiful—and it was beautiful. She was carried into a universe far from Deepweald Cathedral and her father's organ. Her judgment went

adrift from its moorings and drove to sea, full sail. She knew, thanks to her father, what singing means ; but had Mademoiselle Clari sung even as badly as her father's pupils it would have been all the same. It was the music itself, and the divine soprano voice—these were a revelation.

It was all over, so it seemed, before it had fairly begun ; long before Celia had time to be conscious that she was enjoying what she heard. She did not seek to know the name of the song. Seraph's songs have no names. The song was Mademoiselle Clari, and Mademoiselle Clari was the song. Celia's heart throbbed painfully with excitement, and her eyes filled with tears of joy. No wonder that marchionesses and countesses came to pass an hour in heaven when it condescended to visit Deepweald.

The end of the song was lost in a burst of premature applause. Even this added to Celia's excitement, for she had never heard music in public before, and took the natural pleasure that people find in making a noise for an irresistible and spontaneous impulse of enthusiastic admiration. Not that she could

have shown her admiration in that way, but none the less her heart was in the hands of her fellow townspeople. The homely citizens of Deepweald seemed transformed into worshippers at a solemn function where the high-priestess was Mademoiselle Clari. Celia's eyes, as well as they could pierce through a mist that half-blinded them, hung still upon the platform where the heroine of song stood bowing with a gracious smile in which she seemed to read, 'Yes, this is a miracle to you, but it is my native air—I am at home.'

The rest of the concert floated by like a dream. The spirit of the prima donna inspired it all. Whenever and while she sang, all was glory; when she was silent, her echo remained. Barely five minutes seemed to have passed when the bulk of the audience rose, more eager to go away than it had been to come. Celia alone lingered till the very last note, that she might live out the whole of the dream—instinctively trying, as practised dreamers do in sleep, to put off the evil moment of waking. But at last, hardly knowing what had been happening to her, she found herself in the crowded vestibule

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again. The weather was still at broiling-point, but the air from the street struck her as chill and damp, and not at all like the familiar air of Deepweald. Indeed it would have been in nowise strange to her if she had found that the whole city, during the concert, had flown away, and if she had emerged straight from the temple of music into fairyland.

‘Ah, Miss March,’ said Miss Bessy Swann, as the stream from the stalls met the stream from the gallery at the bottom of the stairs; ‘I was certain you would be here, somewhere. Where is Mr. March? I suppose this is a good concert, isn’t it? All the county was here, I declare!’

‘And her diamonds!’ said her mother. ‘That Clari’s, I mean; I’ve seen Lady Quorne’s, and they’re nothing to them. I wonder if they’re all real. Do you know if they’re real, Mr. Gaveston?’


‘I remember reading in some paper,’ said the curate, ‘that the Emperor of Russia, or somebody, gave her a diamond brooch that cost ten thousand pounds.’

‘Ten thousand pounds — fancy! How

beautifully she must sing, to be sure! And she's a handsome woman, too. I wonder if she's got a husband, and if he's fond of her.'

'Fond of a wife that brings him in ten thousand pound a song?' said Mr. Swann, who had come to meet his wife and daughter. 'He's a fool if he ain't, that's all I can say. Thank you, Gaveston, for looking after my women folk. But I can't swallow that ten thousand pound, somehow. Why, it's twice the bishop's whole income. Ten thousand farthings, more likely—you mustn't believe in all the aughts you see in the papers. However, I'm glad you've enjoyed yourselves, and aren't quite stewed away this hot weather. You look uncommonly warm, Miss Celia. However, there's no accounting for tastes. As I always say, give me a fife-and-drum band out in the open.'

'It is not proper,' said Miss Hayward, who was suffering from a seat too far away from the Swann party, and was therefore not inclined to praise without discrimination, 'it is decidedly improper for ladies to accept presents from gentlemen to whom they are not engaged; and if the engagement is broken





off, they ought to return them on both sides. I never heard that the Emperor of Russia was ever engaged to an opera-singer, Mr. Gaveston. But of course he may have been, and then of course I have nothing to say. I daresay her diamonds are real, but it doesn't follow her complexion's the same. Those singers know how to make themselves up, I daresay; and I, for one, never saw that straw-coloured hair go with those gravy-coloured sort of eyes before.'

'I have it!' said the curate, suddenly. 'I knew Clari's face put me in mind of somebody's, but I couldn't think who. It was her eyes. They are just like yours, Miss March—they might be the same.'

Miss Hayward smiled grimly, and even Bessy Swann did not look displeased. It was not disagreeable to hear another girl's eyes likened to eyes which had just been likened to gravy. That was very different from suggesting that they were hazel.

Celia had heard all this after-concert chatter with her ears, but understood it so little as not even to feel its cold water. Her head was one whirl of new-found song, or rather

of what was both new and nameless if the cold, calm music she studied at home was named song. The very cathedral tower, and the familiar caw of the rooks as they sailed home after their day's foray, looked and sounded unreal. She seemed to notice them consciously for the first time. She felt even past repentance.

'If he had really known all,' she thought of her father, 'he would have been there.'

But she trembled, nevertheless, as she entered the brick house in the close at the thought of the coming question, 'Celia, where have you been?' Happily, or unhappily, she had a respite; her father was not taking advantage of a long afternoon to himself to add a demi-semiquaver to his score, but was occupied with a pupil whose parents, unluckily for him, objected to public entertainments on something they called principle. Celia heard the smothered, wavering voice of the only young lady in all Deepweald who was not taking a half-holiday; and oh, how contemptible it sounded! Surely such creatures should be forbidden to learn, she thought, not remembering that the chirp of that poor

amateur, the sparrow, is as much music at heart as the song of the nightingale. She could not spend the few minutes left of her reprieve at her own piano. She could only sit down at the window and wait, knowing that nothing would prevent her father's reading at one glance all her guilt in her eyes. Never, with all his severity, had she been afraid to meet him before. Hitherto, his law had been one with her will. But to-day there was fear far beyond that of a disobedient child. She feared she was not sorry for her sin. As Thekla thought 'I have lived and loved,' so Celia found reckless consolation in 'I have heard Mademoiselle Clari.' Great delights must needs be followed by great punishments. Let them come. Meanwhile, she tried to set to the music of fancy what Mademoiselle Clari must be feeling. How great, surely, must be her ecstasy at having kindled an artistic passion in the people of Deepweald! How humbly proud must she be for having been chosen as the greatest earthly instrument of such an art as hers! What unbroken joy must be her life, who carried with her on earth the very glory

whereof heaven itself is said to be made—the glory of song! What perfect harmony her soul must be!

‘Celia,’ said the organist very gravely.

She started, trembled, and felt her cheeks on fire.

‘Celia,’ he said again, ‘speak as softly as you can.’

She saw a troubled look upon his usually emotionless face that did not seem to concern her own fears. Nevertheless, it must concern them, for conscience told her so.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Why do you want me to speak softly?’


‘Was that your usual voice? Or was it louder?’

‘It was my usual voice.’

‘Do you never speak differently to me?’

‘Never.’

‘Celia! You are relieving me from a horrible fear! I could hardly catch a word of the sermon last Sunday. And Miss Green, who had just gone, sang as if she were under a feather-bed. In fact—I mean that a musician had better die than grow deaf, Celia.’



The fire of guilty fear in her face died out in a moment; Mademoiselle Clari herself was as clean forgotten as if she had never sung. Her days had been far too barren of life to hint at the thought of death, far less of any greater change in their absolute monotony. For the instant, she could no more realise what her father meant than a little child when it first hears people talk about dying; and yet she felt herself turn pale, though rather at the first shadow of unknown change than at the thought of its form. His tone was enough for that: but how could she even imagine her father deprived of the sense which was his very being? The faintest thought of change in him had never entered her head since she was born; it was too immense, as well as too strange, to find its way in without much more than a moment's struggle.

‘No,’ she said eagerly, rather answering some terrible and formless presentiment than her father’s words. ‘Nobody can ever listen to Canon Jones’s sermons or Miss Green’s songs—I can’t; nobody can. I was speaking

lower than usual—I was indeed. The cathedral is full of draughts——’

‘No; it is not fancy. You half-relieved me for a moment, but—I have not caught cold. I don’t know what such a thing means. Jones may preach dull rubbish, and he does; but he bellows it. And your voice is no real test at all; it is too familiar to me. I have been trying not to fear this for months past—well, the fear is over; the thing has come. Bring me my score.’

She had never known him show emotion but once; and that was when he had broken out into a passion at the name of Clari. He showed none now. But the absolute quietness of such a man under the thought of such a doom sank over her like a cloud, in which she began at last to realise what such a doom must mean—and for him! And for his work, that he might never hear!

‘Come?’ she almost whispered.

‘Yes—to-day.’

‘And only because Miss Green——’

‘No. As you say, nobody can hear Miss Green. It is you—you, Celia—that I have not been able to hear! I kept my door ajar,

but all the morning I heard your voice as you practised less and less plainly till three hours ago. I made a note of the very moment when I heard you no more. Well, Heaven's will be done. I must only get on all the faster. I shall have lived long enough when I have heard that. Bring me my score.'

'Oh!' cried Celia, with a breathless burst of joy, 'you were only afraid because you did not hear me?'

'Is not that enough? With all your faults, and they are thousands, you can make yourself heard. Bring——'

'Oh, I am so glad! You heard nothing because—there was nothing to hear!'

'What!' he exclaimed suddenly, 'you have lost a day?'

Even then the system could not yield. John March's hearing concerned John March; but Celia's days concerned the work—which was infinitely more.

'No!' she said. 'I have not lost a day—I have gained years—I have heard Made-moiselle Clari——'

She stopped, thunderstruck. She had braved a scolding—but what spell was there

even in the name of Clari to let loose a storm? The whole face, nay, the whole figure of the organist burst out into a blaze of anger—or rather into that deeper rage of a beaten man which is called despair. She could not recognise even his voice as at last, after a very tempest of silence, he burst out :

‘Her! You have heard her!’

No pen can mock the rage and scorn he threw into the words. Could this be a mere artist’s passion? But how could Celia tell? How could she think, even? She could only tremble all over, as if from the effects of an actual blow.

‘What—what have I done?’ she tried to stammer faintly.

‘Fool, to think even Deepweald safe from her! Yes; you have heard—I see your eyes; you have drunk poison. And in one year more—who knows? But it shall not be too late. I will conquer, in spite of her—yes, in spite of you! This is your last day in Deepweald.’

‘We are going from—where?’

‘Not we—you. What use am I? I have



done all I can, and failed. You must be saved by stronger hands--if you can. You will not hear—Clari—at Lindenheim. . . . Bring me my score.'

## OVERTURE. II. LINDENHEIM.

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### CHAPTER V.

#### ON THE THRESHOLD OF BABEL.

‘Who are you going to walk with, Herr Walter?’

‘I? Oh, with everybody.’

‘Of course, you always do. But to begin with, I mean?’

‘Ah, Miss Lotte, that’s just the question. It is always that first step that’s the trouble, you know. I’m so torn by candidates on all sides that there’s scarcely enough left of me to be called a Me. That’s what we used to call metaphysics in Jena, Miss Lotte. I must divide myself fairly: a leg to one, an arm to another, a head ----’

‘A head? How many heads have you, then?’


‘Cerberus had three—that’s what we used to call Greek at Horchester, Miss Lotte. He was only a dog; and a man has more head than a dog; at least I suppose so. That is what we used to call logic at Oxford, Miss Lotte.’

‘There! I should never have thought it. But then, of course, it needn’t follow that each head has got a brain.’

‘Doesn’t it, though! We used to think so in Paris, I assure you. But, in the same place, to contradict a lady was not what we used to call manners, so let it be one head, if you like it, by all means. My head, then, to Lucas: he is the one exception to the rule that a head must contain some sort of a brain. My ear, an ear, to Wilson: he wants one badly. My——’

‘And a heart? You have at least a hundred hearts, I know, considering the number you throw away.’

‘On the contrary. My stock-in-trade consists of Head—cool, calm, calculating head, I assure you. I never throw anything away,



except good advice and compliments. I have but one heart, Miss Lotte, and that goes with you.'

'Thank you. But after all, when walking is the question, whom the legs go with is the great thing. Suppose, for once, you let them follow your heart, and come with me and—suppose I say Ilma? What does that lonely heart of yours say now?'

'Ilma is going with you?'

'Should I have asked you else? Am I really the mischief-maker and mar-plot they call me? Do *I* want your heart, Herr Walter? Heaven forbid!' said Miss Lotte, with a bright smile of affected horror at the idea of such a thing. 'How slow everybody is in starting—and you call yourself on the committee! A committee of tortoises, I should say. But we are all getting so terribly old. There is no more youth left in the world. As for me, this is my hundred-and-first birthday. But, thank goodness, it's a fine one.'

The centenarian bore her years wonderfully, for she looked no more than eighteen. He with whom she was talking all this non-

sense, with a gravity befitting her professed age, did not carry his so well; he looked at least one-and-twenty, perhaps more. The other old people, scattered in groups round them, mostly ranged from an appearance of fifteen years old to that of twenty. And a cosmopolitan set they were who were gathered together on a lovely summer morning in a dull, rough-paved yard that might be part of a warehouse, or else of a gaol.

The language in which they laughed and chattered was that of Babel with a strong dash of German. Their faces belonged to a great country, the land of everywhere; or at least to that province of it which is bounded on the west by the Red Indians, on the east by the Tartars, and on the south by the Moors. Nevertheless, among all these boys and girls, French, German, English, Scotch, Irish, Swedish, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, American, there was a striking family likeness, more marked than is to be sometimes found even in actual families. There were a few elder people among the groups, and their presence will serve in full for a complete explanation of where we are, and why.

Fame has since then begun to whisper the names even of a few of the younger ones, and many, very many, have learned to perform magnificently on a trumpet hardly to be distinguished from hers—their own. But the elders were all to be recognised. That short fat man, suggestive of nothing so much as a broken-down beer-barrel, with a cigar-stump for a vent-peg, was unrivalled in Europe as the trainer of pianists—unless, indeed, it was by that short lean man, like an electrified mop-head stuck at the top of a pint bottle of sparkling champagne. That other stout and short, quiet and elderly personage, humming a tune in a corner to the prettiest girl he could find, was grand master of all the fiddlers in the world. That tall burly fellow, with the air of a jovial bully, was field-marshal of orchestral armies. That marvelously gentle, child-faced old man, with amiability written even in his creep, was popularly supposed to be capable of harmonising the music of the spheres if he pleased, and of extracting a fugue from the filing of a saw. In one word, we are in the centre of the great music-school which is the centre of

Lindenheim, which is the centre of music itself, which many people think, or think it to be the correct thing to say they think, is one of the centres of the world. For it is a mistake to suppose that, in the case of the world, a circle can have no more than one centre.

Herr Walter was less distinctively a musician, and more distinctively an Englishman, than any there. He had so little of the embryo artist about him as nearly to look like a fish out of water. He did not behave as such, however. He moved about incessantly from group to group, with a ready jest or laugh for everybody; and it was only a most un-Teutonic volubility of tongue that betrayed his speech at least to be a foreigner's. Unusually handsome and overflowing with life and high spirits, it was not strange that the privilege of having Herr Walter for a cavalier should be a little fought for. Meanwhile however he still kept himself free; and it was only a suspicious bunch of violets in his hand instead of his button-hole, and a roving look while he talked to his ever-changing companions, that made him look as if he were less free in reality than in seeming.

Those violets made excellent pegs for jests that seemed very witty to their makers, and even to their hearers ; for nobody there had as yet heard them all more than two hundred and fifty times before. They were more remarkable for hard-hitting than for wit ; but they did not put Herr Walter out of countenance. He invariably gave as good as he got, and better ; and he seemed to enjoy so much the hits he received that the others would have been ungracious indeed to grumble. In some subtle way, the day's sunshine appeared to be inseparably connected with him. The violets were still in his hand when a tall old gentleman in a long frock-coat, with bent shoulders and a smiling Hebrew face, entered the yard, accompanied by a young girl remarkable in no respect but for a shy colour in her cheeks, and for very large dark eyes that were looking steadfastly on the rough stones of the floor. The old gentleman led her up to Miss Lotte, and therefore to Herr Walter, who happened to be there because he was everywhere.

‘ My dear young lady,’ said the old gentle-



man blandly, 'I bring you here Miss Celia March, out of England. She first comes among you on an excellent occasion for making friends. I leave you in good hands, Miss March,' he said, in English. 'And I hope you will enjoy your first day in Linden-heim very much indeed.'

'And so she shall, Herr Professor,' said Herr Walter. 'I am also out of England, Miss March—very much out—and I'll see that you do.'

Miss Lotte smiled, and held up a forefinger, like a sign of warning.

'Well?' he said. 'If I can take care of two, I can take care of three—can't I? What's the good of having three heads, if one throws one away?'

'I wasn't thinking of your head,' said Lotte. 'I've just been appointed chaperon, you see, and I must do my duty. Are you still coming with us? Or how long are Miss March and I to wait for you?'

'Just half a minute,' he said, still looking round him with the glance which was the only undecided thing about him, and lingering. Suddenly his quick eyes fell upon a

group hitherto hidden ; and then he showed he could do something else than smile—he frowned. But the frown lasted no longer than an instant. He at once stuck the bunch of violets into his own button-hole. ‘Come on then,’ he said. ‘I’m ready now.’

Miss Lotte saw where the violets went ; and she also looked round.

‘Ilma—with the enemy ! What does that mean ?’

‘Fancy a girl asking a man to say what a girl means !’ said Walter, with the brightest and most genuine of smiles. ‘Come along ; how long are Miss March and I to wait for you ?’

‘Your heart won’t go with us, though, after all.’

‘Won’t it, though ! It will go exactly where I please. “There are maidens in Scotland.” Forwards ! March !’

## CHAPTER VI.


### THE NEW GIRL.

CELIA, out of Deepweald. Celia thrown all at once among a hundred lively and chattering young people — all strangers and all strange ! Surely there is matter for a hundred metaphors—one a head at least, and more. But the fish out of water himself is too much at home, compared with her, to serve as a simile. It is enough, without metaphors for crutches, to think for one moment of Deepweald ; that sleeping, aye, and snoring beauty, with its unbroken and monotonous caw of rooks and old maids ; its slumberous cathedral atmosphere ; its days of plodding, with nothing but incomprehensible mystical talk about a piece of never-ending

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work to represent Hope, and that desperately ; its absence of conscious thoughts, its impenetrability even to unconscious dreams ; its humdrum ways of vegetating, with no breaks but a weekly Dorcas meeting ; and then to turn at once to a sudden picture of eager, overflowing life that swarmed round Celia now, intensified as it was by more than a merely foreign colouring. She—if indeed she were still the same she—was overwhelmed ; she must, by the help of steamers and railways have arrived there somehow, but she felt as if she had fallen there from the sky into the sea. The sun shone brightly, and there was nothing but merriment to be heard or seen. But it was not the same sun that used to shine through the elms in the home-close ; and the sea, to her, looked and felt bitterly black and cold. She was afraid of life, just as the thought of happiness frightens those who have grown to be at home with misery. She had never lived, and did not know how.

Lotte said something to her kindly, as they left the yard and entered the quaint old-world German street, whose atmosphere, by half



suggesting the old-world quiet of Deepweald, made her feel her strangeness in a strange world all the more keenly.

‘Don’t you speak German, Miss March?’ asked Herr Walter, who certainly was not one to sympathise with the sorrows of the shy. Of all the contrasts in this world of such things the greatest, at that moment, was that which lay between Celia March and Herr Walter. It seemed strange that they should own the same mother-tongue.

‘No,’ said Celia, blushing at nothing. Lotte smiled a little. Was Herr Walter beginning a new flirtation so soon?

‘Never mind, it will soon come. I’ll be dragoman. You don’t know Lindenheim? We’re now in the Rosenthal—valley of roses that means. A delightful thing, isn’t it, to find such a piece of real nature in the middle of a town? It will get quite wild farther on. It’s a wonderful place for “savage greens,” as a friend of mine, who studies English, calls wild flowers. I mean to learn painting some day, for the sake of the Rosenthal. How is it you are only among us to-day? The new students were examined long ago.’

At that moment she was suddenly seized with a new and doubly uncomfortable fear. She had gathered, even at Deepweald, that when a very young man is walking into the country with a very young woman a third companion is tolerably certain to be in the way. No doubt the German girl looked very good-tempered as well as good-natured, and the young Englishman was doing his best to put her at her ease ; but she felt what for a shy person is even worse than feeling bored ; she felt like a bore. She was no doubt spoiling for others a walk that she herself was not going to enjoy ; and, under the influence of this dog-in-the-manger-like feeling, would have given a great deal for courage enough to ask the others to go on talking German, and to treat her as if she were not there at all. She was still more vexed when the girl went on a few paces in front, as if piqued at being dropped out of the conversation. But there was only the faintest suspicion of the best-tempered mock-malice in the smile and nod that Lotte threw back at Herr Walter as she joined another group and left the young Englishman and the new girl to themselves.

‘What are you going to study?’ he asked, without giving her time to be frightened at the thought of a tête-à-tête with a stranger. ‘Where are you living? Have you many friends here? Excuse me, but I should never have taken you for a fellow-countrywoman; your colouring is too dark, and your eyes are too large. Whom do you believe in? Schumann? Of course. I can see at once that you despise and abhor everybody else from the bottom of your soul. You will be drenched here with Mendelssohn—Mendelssohn—Mendelssohn—till you are sick of him. When you are, rebel; and I’ll back you. I lead the opposition here, you know; I always do, everywhere; and I knew you were one of us, from the first moment I saw you. By-the-way, you don’t know my name yet: I am Walter Gordon, at your service, “out of England,” as they always add here.’

‘You are very kind,’ said Celia, with a half-quarter smile; for there was this about Walter Gordon, that, after a minute, it was harder to feel shy with him than not to feel shy. ‘But, please, don’t let me keep you from your friends.’

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‘ And that’s very kind of you, Miss March; but you couldn’t if you tried. If I see you safe through the valley of roses, as I mean to, it’s because I choose, and nobody shall prevent me, not even you. I am passionately attached to all new friends, and the newer the better. Besides, you may be attacked by the wild beasts—the butterflies, or the savage greens. Only think of being torn in pieces by wild butterflies! So answer my questions, please; that was always the first duty of a new boy at Horchester; so why shouldn’t it be of a new girl? Now that girls are claiming men’s rights, they must accept men’s duties.’

His good-natured nonsense had either its intentional or accidental effect; it turned her shy half-quarter smile into a whole quarter.

‘ I am going to be a singer,’ she said, answering his first question.

‘ I know that; I could tell that from your profile.’

‘ I am to live at a chemist’s, the Golden Lion.’

‘ I know. He has a freckled daughter



with red hair, who studies the piano. Whom do you know here ?

‘Nobody.’

‘So you have no friends? Nor had I at first; and now I have a hundred and seventy-six friends—no, a hundred and seventy-seven, reckoning you. And now, you do schwärm for Schumann?’

‘I don’t know——’

‘Not know!’

‘I never heard of him; and what is it to schwärm?’

‘To schwärm is—to schwärm. But, *Corpo di Bacco*, Miss March! If you don’t believe in Schumann, in whom do you believe? Don’t oblige me to cut you by saying Mendelssohn!’

‘I know Palestrina, and Porpora, and Cimarosa, and Bach——’

Walter Gordon took off his hat, stood still for an instant, and bowed profoundly. ‘I reverence your taste, Miss March. I have the deepest veneration for my grandfather. He was a most worthy old gentleman; but, alas! he died before I was born. Forward! is my word, and it must be yours. Let the dead

bury their dead, say I. We have new worlds to conquer, and have done with the old.'

Was this nonsense, or jest, or blasphemy? She could not tell: and, indeed, her companion gave her no time to criticise the talk with which he bewildered her. She could only dimly and timidly feel the contrast beside which Deepweald and Lindenheim, herself and Walter Gordon, were as nothing—her father's grim spirit, engaged in the Herculean labour of reviving the Past with its dead glories, and the eager spirit of the Future which first met her face to face to-day.

'Where do you live, Miss March,' he asked suddenly, 'when you are at home—as we used to say at Horchester? In London, I suppose?'

'At Deepweald.'

'Deepweald! Ah, I was sure you did not live in London. I don't know Deepweald; it's about the only place I don't know. I am what they call a rolling stone, and I'm proud to own it. I like rolling, and I hate moss. I think we must have got a drop of gipsy blood in us, we Gordons. We're

mostly in the cotton line at Manchester, and the moss sticks pretty well ; but I had a desperately Bohemian uncle, to judge from all I've heard of him, and I flatter myself I take after him. So, after rolling from Manchester to Horchester, from Horchester to Oxford, from Oxford to Lincoln's Inn, that drop of gipsy blood broke out. I felt I couldn't rest in one place, Miss March, if it were the woolsack or the throne in Canterbury Cathedral. I am sure you agree with me. You look like a very queen of the gipsies.'

'I don't know——'

'But I do. I can see it in you. Depend upon it, everybody who feels a call to go singing about the world is one of the wandering races—a gipsy or a Jew. So I went off to Paris, and studied medicine for a whole year. That is a profession if you like, Miss March—the only one that deals with real things, and brings you face to face with Nature. But—I don't know exactly how—I rolled on to Jena, and then at last I found my true vocation, which is music, and here. That vagabond uncle of mine that I take

after was a musician, you must know. I shouldn't wonder if it were a case of transmigration of souls.'

'He is dead then?'

'As a door-nail. I don't know why, but I have a tremendous sympathy with that ne'er-do-well uncle of mine. I suppose it's because uncles, as a class, are so confoundedly respectable. I beg your pardon, Miss March, but we don't measure our words by the inch here. And I feel rather sore on the subject of uncles in general—my live uncles are such desperate Cottonopolitans. Do you suffer from uncles, Miss March?'

'I have no relations; only my father. He is the cathedral organist at Deepweald.'

'And he brought you up on all those old fellows, Palestrina and Porpora? Let me see. Deepweald—Deepweald—no; I'm afraid I must confess I have not heard of him; and yet cathedral organists—he is not a composer, I suppose?'

'My father? He is the greatest composer in the world!'

'Indeed! I've no doubt I'm very ignorant—let me see—what has he written?'

‘He has not finished it yet, and I don’t know its name. He has only been twenty years over it yet——’

Walter Gordon did not even smile, not even in the slightest degree, though he must have been sorely tempted. ‘I have no doubt it will be splendid,’ he said, quite gravely. ‘My Bohemian uncle, too, was a one-work man, so far as fame goes. In fact, he was the Gordon—Andrew Gordon—and being his great-nephew is my bit of pride. Talk of Englishmen not being musicians if they like, or anything else they please to be! Of course you know his “Comus”?’

‘I’m afraid I’m very stupid. I never heard of him.’

‘Your father must be a strange teacher! You’ve never heard of “Comus”—never heard of Andrew Gordon? Never heard the story of its coming out in London when the composer was not as old as I am, and the craze it made? Nor how, just when he held the top of the ladder in his hand, he went off to Italy, or somewhere, and dropped out of sight and under water, and never was heard of again?’

‘Never.’

‘Well, such is fame. But he was a great man ; and whatever his end was, I’d rather roll on down to the dogs, and have written “Comus,” than own all the cotton in Manchester. But here we are at Waaren ; this is where we are going to enjoy ourselves. Are you hungry, Miss March ? I am.’

## CHAPTER VII.

### CELIA'S FIRST HOLIDAY.

THE party had arrived at a large coffee-garden in a small village in a pleasant country. Walter Gordon made Celia a little bow and left her ; and she felt as those do from whom, in the middle of their first swimming lesson, the corks are suddenly withdrawn. All her shyness, which she had half forgotten, rushed back upon her doubly and trebly. She watched her only protector moving about from one to another, while the whole party broke up into new groups and scattered itself over the gardens. In a few minutes the oldest professors and the youngest pupils—that is to say, those who, being nearest to one of the ends of life, had most

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in common—were deep in the noisiest games they could think of. The middle-aged people of twenty either joined them after a while, or lounged about in knots, or set out for a longer ramble in twos, threes, and fours. Celia felt she also ought to do something, and not stand there awkwardly all by herself as if she were stupid or sullen; but what could she do? If she could have had her will, she would have flown straight back from all this life and merriment into the dark, prison-like room at home, where her music-stool must be missing her sorely. The warmth of the foreign sunshine brought the tears to her eyes; and, at that moment, a flock of rooks above her began to caw—she heard the very voice of home.

‘What frivolity!’ said a young man near her—a very young man in spectacles, with yellow hair at least two-and-a-half feet long, which might, possibly, have dreamed wildly of a comb once, and of a brush never. ‘Life is short—art is long. Every moment,’ he added solemnly, emphatically, and gutturally, ‘every moment that passes, passes and never comes back again. You, mademoiselle,’ he



said, turning to Celia, 'you, I see, have something better to think of than these follies.'

The solemnity of the young man should have suited her mood better than the airiness of Walter Gordon. But it certainly did not ; and before she could turn the little German her father had taught her into an answer—

'True,' said the ubiquitous Walter himself, with equal solemnity. He was certainly a remarkable young man, thought Celia ; he seemed to have the art of being foremost in everything that was going on, all at once ; and a quick feeling of relief came over her to find him, after all, so unexpectedly near. 'True, Fritz ; these things are only fit for professors and babies. Why are we here ?'

'That is precisely the question, Herr Gordon. Kant says ——'

'I know, and I don't agree with him. You needn't trouble yourself to argue ; I know everything you're going to say. You are going to mislead Miss March here into dissipation, and to prove to her out of Kant, which in our country we spell with a C, that all amusements are waste of time except flirtation with a philosopher. I know you're a

regular Don Juan, Meyer, but it's unfair of you to a girl that doesn't know what flirtation means. Let her find it out for herself, there's a good fellow, and come and blow the organ while I play. We'll get the church keys, and I'll show you a grand idea that came into my head a minute ago. Will you come, Miss March? I was telling Meyer that you don't know German yet, so he must keep his metaphysics to himself for a little. What—you do know German after all?' he said, suddenly reading her face and colouring—a graceful awkwardness that became him quite as well as his smile. 'You know what I really said to Meyer? Never mind; I only wanted to save you from a bore, and I promised to protect you from the wild beasts, you know. Meyer is a genius—whatever you do, keep clear of geniuses.'

'Really?' she asked, opening her eyes to their largest, and with interest. She had not understood his remarks on flirtation so well as he imagined, and somehow his blush had made her less shy of him than ever. 'A real genius? He—he doesn't look like one.'

‘Yes, a real genius. He never heard of soap, and he composes like Mendelssohn ; and no wonder, for he doesn’t spoil his cribbing by changing a note here and there, as timid people do. He’ll be a success, that man. People who wear spectacles and copy Mendelssohn always are. Ah, here are Lambert and Miss Ida. Come all of you to the church and have a treat ; you shall hear Fritz Meyer blow the bellows. Come, Meyer, you blow for me, and then I’ll blow for you—blow for blow.’

They made their way to the plain old village church, which Celia alone entered reverently. Walter Gordon scrambled to the organ ; Meyer, on the principle of ‘Tickle me and I’ll tickle thee,’ set himself to slave at the bellows in order to secure his turn at the keys. Suddenly the church was filled with strains that assuredly it had never heard before. A peal of laughter rose from Lambert and Miss Ida as an outrageous medley of student songs, gathered no doubt from Jena at midnight, made the genius stop blowing in a rage of insulted dignity. But Lambert took his place with a will, and the fun went

on furiously — very small fun indeed, but brilliant for a Lindenheim country party, where new and original jokes were wofully few and far between.

But Celia did not laugh. To the daughter of John March a church-organ was a sacred thing, apart from the place where it was being turned into ridicule. Every chord in her whole life was roughly jarred by every note ; unimaginative as she was, she could fancy herself at a veritable witches' sabbath, and was ashamed for her own unintentional presence in such revelry. She sympathised with the unkempt genius, and felt inclined to hate Walter Gordon.

Meyer saw her expression through the indignant gleam of his spectacles. ' This comes of following apes and blowing for buffoons, mein Fräulein ! ' he said, as he strode away, followed by a blare of triumph from the organ. When Walter Gordon had had enough of it and looked round for Celia, she also had gone.

She did not wish to see Walter Gordon again. That performance of his on the organ

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was her first real sorrow—the loss of an illusion. The thing was a trifle ; but there are trifles of which it is impossible to speak too strongly. A day like this in a new world, where every word was an event and every step was new, had already been as long as a lifetime—as long as her whole existence at Deepweald put together. And, since it had been made up of trifles, trifles had become important things. Whatever Walter Gordon might think of her, or whether he thought of her at all, he had been a great deal to her ; the only friend of the long lifetime of that day. By giving her long respites from the pain of shyness he had made her now and then quite happy enough to be able to feel unhappy, instead of merely timid and dull. And now what was she to think of him ? She did not know ; but she felt she had lost a friend, and the sunshine that had just begun to peep out went in again. At Deepweald she had almost grown up into womanhood ; and now she seemed to have been thrown back towards childhood by years and years. She sat down again at the edge of the lawn and

looked at the games, pulling up blades of grass for pastime, and looking very like a child who has been sent to Coventry for ill-temper.

‘A fine cavalier is Herr Walter!’ said Lotte, forgetting Celia’s supposed ignorance of German. ‘What’s the good of being chaperon to a girl that can’t even make Herr Walter flirt with her? Anybody can do that, so long as he never saw her before. Why, his walking with you all the way to Waaren gave you more enemies for life than you can count on your fingers. That’s a wonderful success, I can tell you, for a girl who has never been heard sing. Aren’t you glad? Why, I was here a whole week before I made three deadly enemies, though I tried hard; but Herr Walter wasn’t here then, and it’s wonderful what lots of girls hate each other since he came. I’m desperately in love with Herr Walter myself, you know; and I do so want you to be too, so that I can have somebody to compare emotions with now that my favourite rival’s gone, and I don’t like Ilma. Do fall in love with Herr Walter, Miss March, to oblige me! It is so delight-

ful to talk about what one feels. Come and eat—at this minute I feel starving.’

Celia opened her eyes at her and followed; and presently was sitting at a long table made of planks and tressels, feasting on milk, black bread, and ham, and thinking that this vestibule of the temple of music was a very strange place. The talk round her was mostly about music indeed, but to her it was all Greek and Hebrew. At home, she would as soon have thought of talking about music as about the air she breathed; and to gush or jest over it, as her new companions did, was too incomprehensible to seem like sacrilege. It seemed more like lunacy. After the meal the quiet-looking professor who had hummed the tune to the pretty girl in the courtyard struck up a waltz on the violin with no more air of condescension than if he had been a wandering fiddler.

‘Pray give me a turn,’ said Walter Gordon, who had seen her from the far end of the table.

‘I can’t dance,’ she said, coldly. ‘I never tried.’

‘Never tried to dance! Impossible! But

you'll find sitting still awfully slow, and it's so easy to dance, with such music. Let me give you a lesson ; in one turn you shall feel as if dancing were the only thing worth living for.'

'No, thank you, please ! I shall learn much better by looking on.'

'But it goes to my heart to see you sitting there all alone.'

'It need not. I would rather not dance, indeed ! Please let me see you dance, Mr. Gordon.'

'Well, if you will, you shall,' he said, with his ever-ready laugh as if the whole world were made of joy ; and, in less than a second, he was whirling round the room with Lotte, and making her laugh too.

Not only had Celia never danced, but she had never heard a dance tune played except on a barrel-organ. To her this rough-and-ready improvisation of a ball was like a child's first pantomime. And then the dance music she now heard was the nearest possible approach to that of the magic fiddle in the story, that made judge, jury, and hangman dance madly together under the gallows-tree.



It did not only help people to dance ; it inspired. Her own ignorant feet began to burn and tingle till she, too, longed to swim with the rest upon the waves of sound. This, also, was surely music, in spite of what her father might say—her father, who had condemned Clari unheard. The waltz whirled on with but few pauses, and Celia's own grave eyes laughed and sparkled with sympathy as the revel grew under the grave professor's bow. She no longer felt alone ; her heart was dancing, though her feet were still.

Is there need to tell how young people walk home on a moonlight night—when they have such a chance—after such a day ? In that regard, Saxony resembles the rest of the world. Some very young men, of course, kept together and boasted of having long and long ago found flirtation vanity, like all things save tobacco-smoke and themselves. But it is only fair to Celia's new fellow-students to say that such cases of idiocy were fewer among them than in most companies. In general, they straggled off into small parties, mostly of two, and compressed into

that hour's moonlight walk more wholesome and unaffected nonsense than had been spread over the whole of the day. And somehow, she knew not how, Celia once more found herself by the side of Walter Gordon.

'Well,' he asked, 'how have you enjoyed yourself? . Not very much, I'm afraid.'

'I have, though, indeed—that is, all but one thing.' She coloured at her own boldness as she spoke; but it was in truth anything but boldness—the slip into frankness of a tongue that had never had a chance of learning even conventional hypocrisies.

'And what was that? The fireworks? They were a failure, I own. Well, better luck next time. It is very odd, but the fireworks are invariably damp at Waaren.'

'No; I did not like hearing the organ played in that way. And I did not like Herr Meyer——'

'I should think not, indeed!'

'I did not like Herr Meyer to be laughed at for being angry. I was angry too.'

'Why, Miss March? What is so laughable as anger—not yours, of course, but Meyer's—any solemn prig's, I mean? He

deserves it, for his wet-blanket, damp-fire-work philosophy. Fancy bringing in Kant at a country-party ! As to the organ—I do hope you are not a prim English girl who thinks everything wrong that she hasn't been used to. That's the phrase, I believe. You can't be like that, I'm sure, with those Italian eyes that are now regarding me so tragically under the moon. But if it really vexed you, I am really sorry ; I wouldn't have done that for the world.'

'It's not vexing me that I mind. But you see I've always lived in an organ——'

He looked as if some very obvious comment on the discomfort of such a residence were on the tip of his tongue ; but he changed his mind. 'I see,' he said, 'you are the Organ-spirit. That accounts for a great many things. But spirits are never called "Miss," nor have they surnames. Nobody ever says "Miss Titania," or rather, "Mrs. Oberon." What is your real name ? Your Christian-name, as mortals say ?'

'Celia.'

'Celia—almost Cecilia, but prettier—all vowel and liquid, with just a little piquant

hiss at the beginning to give it character ; a sort of a sigh melting into a song. I never knew a Celia, except the young person who kept an arbour, or Whitehead's Celia—"Celia altogether." But what were we saying ? Oh, I know ; that music is a serious thing. And so it is, but it is also a joyful thing ; and why shouldn't an organ be allowed to have a good laugh as well as a fiddle ? Art that fears a jest is pedantry, and ought to be killed by what it fears as soon as possible. I wouldn't give a fig for a man who's afraid to laugh at what he believes in. It would only show that he's afraid he doesn't quite believe. I will teach you to laugh, and you shall teach me to be grave ; for I agree with you that there's a time for all things, even for a Pan-pipe to cry, and for a solemn old organ to shake its sides. What would art, or life, or love, or anything be worth if it did not mean joy ?

Celia thought of her father, and of the little joy that art seemed to mean or bring to him. As for herself, she knew that there was such a word as 'joy' in some very old-fashioned and forgotten songs, but nothing more. But

Walter's genial enthusiasm, half humorous, half sincere, touched the new chord in her heart that had been first awakened by the dance she had been unable to share.

Assuredly there were more worlds in the world than one. She must have thought so half aloud, for Walter answered it as if he had heard her thinking.

'True ; so sensible people make the whole round, find out the pleasantest, and build their houses there, only making excursions to the others when they want change of air. I am one of those sensible people, and now you know me just as well as I know you. Ah, here are——'

He became stiff and silent for a moment as they were overtaken by a larger group, containing Lotte and a tall, dark, exceedingly handsome girl, who looked Celia all over from head to heel—in fact, gave her an uncompromising, cold-eyed stare.

'So now, Miss Lotte and Miss Celia,' said Walter, 'I will see you both safe home. Hasn't it been a glorious day?'

'You seem to have found it so,' said the dark girl, again making Celia redden under

her stare. 'And so have I. Haven't we, Herr Rosen?'

'I'm glad you've enjoyed yourself, Miss Ilma,' said Walter, raising his cap. 'Good night. Good night, Rosen. Lambert, I'll see you again presently, when I've seen these young ladies home.'

'Well, Miss March,' said Lotte, as she joined Celia and Walter, 'I must say that, for a timid English girl, you have begun your career well. You have made at least fifty girls wild with envy and one mad with jealousy. It's lucky you lodge at the chemist's, so that you can keep your eye on what poisons are bought there during the next day or two. I don't mind giving you food for vanity, Herr Walter, because your capacity for swallowing it all and thriving on it is well known. But I am ashamed of you. What is it the English say? "Be off with the old loaf," namely, Ilma, "before you——"'

'Nonsense, Miss Lotte; can't you wait till Miss March gets into our ways? She'll think she's mistaken a madhouse for a music-school. Never mind her, Miss March. It's she is the one who is mad with jealousy, and

is thinking of giving, or taking, a dose of elixir mortis.'

'I, Herr Walter? I haven't been jealous for six weeks, not of anybody. I only wish I could be: what is life worth without emotions? I thought you were jealous when Ilma went over to the enemy. You certainly frowned like thunder; I never knew you could frown before.'

'Did I? I have no enemy but Mendelssohn. Good night, Miss Lotte: here is your door. Good night, and sleep well.'

'Good night, Herr Walter,' said Lotte, with her good-natured smile. 'Good night, Miss March. Mind, we are to be friends. So mind and bring me a new emotion or two when we meet again. I am so tired of all the old ones. Good night, and sleep well. I shall, anyhow.'

If Celia had already heard Greek and Hebrew, she now heard Aztec and Japanese.

'Tell me one thing, Miss Celia,' said Walter suddenly. 'Don't you think we're all a pack of babies, and that I'm the babyest of all?'

'I don't know anything; my head is in a *whirl*.'

‘But when it unwhirls, please don’t think me quite as mad as I seem. Lotte is an excellent girl, and we have made a sort of silent bargain to tease one another as much as we can, that’s all. You must take whatever she says of me or to me as part of the game, and nothing more. But here’s the Golden Lion. Good night, Miss Celia. Will you honour these violets by taking them? They’re not too fresh, I’m afraid, but they seem to me to have the perfume of a delightful day. If you don’t think so, throw them away.’

‘But I do think so,’ said Celia. ‘It has been my first holiday.’

‘If I didn’t think so!’ said Walter. ‘I knew it as soon as I saw you. Never mind, you’ll be able to make up for it here. Good night, Miss Celia, and au revoir.’

‘Twas not her face, for sure in that  
Is nothing more than common;  
And all her sense is only chat  
Like any other woman.

‘Her voice, her touch, might give the alarm,  
It might be both or neither;  
In short, ’twas the provoking charm  
Of Celia altogether,’



sang Walter Gordon to himself, as he went his way to the haunt where a crowd of university students and others met nightly to smoke knaster and drink Bavarian beer.

Celia said her prayers, went to bed, and dreamed that she was Mademoiselle Clari.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CELIA'S FIRST OFFER.

CELIA woke next morning with a strange sense of dissipation. Three times over she had to say to herself, 'I am in Lindenheim, I am in Lindenheim, I am in Lindenheim,' before she could realise the sufficiently extraordinary fact that she was no longer in the close at Deepweald, that it was foreign sunshine shining through the window into a foreign room. But the first thing her eyes fell upon when she woke was the little bunch of violets, standing in the glass of water where she had placed them overnight; and, though they had gone through a great deal of withering since they were first gathered, they still had a little sweetness left in them. They,

too, looked dissipated, and very much indeed as if they had been carried away from their home in some sleepy floral Deepweald. But they were working hard to give out their sweetness to the last, and to adapt themselves no less to a tumbler of strange water than to their native moss; and so, to Celia, each violet was a sympathy.


She lay awake in the sunshine for many minutes, letting her thoughts run about for a little while before facing another wonderful day. Naturally they ran towards the most remarkable of all her experiences hitherto, and that was Herr Walter. Her knowledge of young men had been till now confined to Mrs. Swann's drawing-room, where the Reverend Reginald Gaveston was, beyond all rivalry, the most interesting specimen among the few who found recreation in reading poetry to a large circle of amateur seamstresses on hot afternoons. She tried to picture Herr Walter in such a frame, and could not make his portrait fit it in any way. She was quite sure he would be even more out of his element at a Deepweald Dorcas meeting than she herself had been at a Lin

denheim picnic. She did not approve of him, and he had managed to offend her a hundred times; and she wondered what he thought of her in return.

After shyly taking her coffee in company with the apothecary's family—worthy people, ruled by a hospitable desire to make everybody comfortable, and a hopeless ignorance of how to do it—she sat down to write a letter to her father. It is to be hoped there are few who have realised at once what that meant to Celia. She had seen letters from her father's pupils, but she had never written one since she was born. Her spelling was by no means a fixed principle, and if it had been, what in the world was she to spell? Ever since that never-to-be-forgotten concert, the distance between her father and herself, never of the closest, had widened and widened; she felt that her presence in Lindenheim was a banishment for her mysterious sins, and that unless she sent him a non-existent chronicle of work he would care nothing for anything she had to say. Is there such a thing as impulsive reticence as well as impulsive out-speaking? At any rate, even

her poor powers of imagination could very easily picture her father's eyebrows as they frowned over an account of a picnic and its frivolities. What would he care about Herr Walter and Fräulein Lotte? It was a strange feeling that such very real existences were still to him the unknown names that till yesterday they had been to her also; that she already had a life in which he had no part, though it had lasted but a night and a day. But though this was the relation between a father and his only child, it must not for a moment be thought that it gave her any sort of positive pain. She knew nothing of what is commonly meant by such relations, and was not made by nature to guess anything she did not know. She was far too well-drilled a machine for such unmechanical business as guess-work, or to take a conscious view of life as being anything but a mill-horse round of crotchets and semi-quavers.


However, she laid open her sheet of letter-paper before her, dipped her pen into her ink-bottle, and wrote, 'Lindenheim, Friday.' At the end of twenty minutes, she had ad-




vanced no farther. And, before she could nibble inspiration from the end of her pen, the beaming presence of Fräulein Lotte was in the room.

‘Good morning!’ said the German girl brightly, and with her constant smile of observant but good-natured amusement at the world and all its ways. She seemed quite like an old acquaintance, so very long ago yesterday seemed to be. Celia coloured, but not without pleasure; she had been getting to feel very helpless all alone over her unwritten letter at the Golden Lion, and very much at sea; and the sight of somebody between whom and herself the ice had already been broken was a sort of relief to her.

‘I came to see if I could be of any use to you,’ went on Lotte. ‘You seem to be such a wonderfully lonely young person; you put me just in mind of a kitten before it’s nine days old, and hasn’t learned to see. I wonder why? Your eyes are a great deal too large to be blind. You are writing a letter? Yes, you are just the sort of girl that would sit down and write a letter the first thing. And you will tell everything. Ah, I wonder now



what you are going to say! I know there will be something in it about me and Herr Walter, and I should so much like to know, particularly what you are going to say about me. Don't put us together, for the love of heaven; of course, I'm passionately in love with Herr Walter, as you know, but you needn't tell it to all the world. I am so glad he gave you the violets yesterday. I've quite set my heart on having you for a rival, and not that horrid Ilma. I don't like rivals who turn up their noses and say nasty things. And one must have a rival, of course; love, Fräulein Celia, is nothing without jealousy and all that sort of thing—nothing at all. I should like to know what you're going to say about us all—about me. Will you show me? I've got it into my head you're one of those unpleasant people who always tell everything and always tell the truth, which would account for your talking so little. They say you English people never do talk, but I've never found it so. Herr Walter is an Englishman. Ah, that's the worst of keeping to truth; it leaves one so little to say, and makes one seem so dull. All the same,



I should like to see the truth about myself for once in a way, for the sake of the sensation. Write me down, please, just exactly as I am. ' But don't, please, say that my tongue runs faster than my wit. Everybody says that, so of course it can't possibly be true. As for Herr Walter, well, you may say what you please. I hope you'll abuse him well ; that will show you're going to be in love with him. When you've finished your letter, I'll go out with you, and put you in the way of things. I had to learn them myself once. You wouldn't think what a shy girl I was when I first came to Lindenheim ; yes, as shy as can be, for nearly two whole days. But I didn't like that sensation, and soon made up my mind not to be shy any more. But there, dash off your letter ; I'm keeping you from beginning, and I want you to end.'

Celia's difficulties were by no means lessened by having a pair of eyes to watch her, however good-humouredly, as she nibbled her obstinate pen.

' It seems a difficult thing, that letter of yours,' said Lotte. ' Can I help you ? Whom is it to ?'



‘I’m writing to my father,’ said Celia.

‘Oh, that all! Say you are just going out with a delightful friend named Lotte, and that you’ll write more to-morrow. I’ve been going to write a real long letter to-morrow for—ah, two years now. What an old woman I’m getting, to be sure. Ah well! There, write that down; that will do for now.’

But Celia’s pen did not move, though it had been inspired by ink full three times.

‘Herr Walter,’ said Lotte, ‘has taught me a great deal of English. I know what an “awful fix” means. It’s what you seem to be in now. Come, you might as well get as far as “My dear governor;” there’s some more of my English for you.’

‘Oh no,’ said Celia, aghast at the thought, ‘that would never do!’

‘Isn’t “governor” English for father? What do you call yours? Papa?’

‘No.’

‘What then?’

‘I—I don’t know what to call him,’ said Celia, hot with despair.

‘Not know what to call your own father?’

What an idea! What do you call him when you talk to him?

'I never called him anything.'

'Well, that is the oddest thing! Not even when you were a baby?'

'Never at all.'

'But, how do you manage then, when other people are by, and you want to say something to him?'

'Other people are never by. We are always alone whenever I am with him.'

'Is he in bad health, perhaps—your Herr Governor?'

'He is never ill. He is the cathedral organist at Deepweald. But he never sees anybody but when he is obliged.'

'Gott in Himmel! What a man. You had better write to your mother then.'

'I have no mother.'

'Ah! Well, to your sister then, or somebody that has got a name.'

'I have nobody to write to but my father, mein Fräulein——'

'“Lotte,” if you please.'

'And I have never written to him, and I don't know how.'

‘Well, that does complicate matters terribly, to be sure. It is an “awful fix” indeed—and how to help you out of it, I’m sure I don’t know. I must ask Herr Walter; he has been at Jena and studied philosophy. But you needn’t post your letter for some hours yet, any way. You can write the rest of it, and leave a blank for “My dear.” I must see your portrait of me. Come, you will never get your pen to go by biting. Give it to me; I will see what I can do. “My dear”——we’re going to leave a place for that, you know. You say you have never written to him before? Then I needn’t say anything about the handwriting. “I write in German to make you read me very attentively. I am very well, and enjoying myself. I have made a charming friend; her name is Lotte. She is as beautiful as an angel, and plays the piano like a demon. I wish you knew her—or rather I don’t, for I don’t want a stepmother. Otherwise she would suit you perfectly, for she hates company, and her only fault is that she is so silent and shy. Her hair is golden and her eyes are blue. I have also made the ac-

quaintance of a young Englishman—Herr Walter Gordon, out of England. He is the handsomest and most amiable young man I ever saw, and we shall be great friends. He, too, plays the piano, though not so well as Lotte. I can't write any more now, for I am going out; but will write a real long letter next time. I send you lots of kisses, and am your loving daughter, Celia." There; that's done in no time. Now we'll go to the Conservatorium, and will post it as we go. And there—I have got the truth about myself at last, any way.'

Celia looked with all her eyes at Lotte; but there was no longer a twinkle in her new friend's sudden judge-like gravity to show whether this was a joke or a serious attempt to help her out of her difficulties. But even she could not fail to catch the horror of writing such a letter to such a man. If Lotte had known him she could not have made the discord more discordant; only the word 'governor' was wanted to bring the letter to perfection. If humour—as is said—lies in incongruity of ideas, no better joke had ever been made. Celia, whose sense of

humour was very far from being her strong point, and to whom Lotte's peculiar style of talk was still Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldee, felt aghast at the thought of such a letter falling into her father's hands.

'What? Won't it do?' asked Lotte. 'We'll show it to Herr Walter, and ask him. He can write letters, I know—that is to say, I'm told he can.'

'Oh, Fräulein Lotte; no——'

'I'm not Fräulein; I'm Lotte, and you are a little goose, Celia. As if I'd show Herr Walter anything that would make him vainer than he is already. For he'd swallow the part about himself as easily as an oyster. He's a man, Celia; and a woman's vanity is nothing to a man's. Vanity is sentiment with us, but it's passion with them. We're vain of being admired, but they're vain of admiring themselves. But come, as you won't have my letter, you must write it for yourself: only not to-day.'

'Please give me that letter, Lotte.'

'Not I. It shan't be wasted. I'll turn "Lotte" into "Celia," and "plays the piano" into "sings," and "gold and blue" into

“black and brown,” and it’ll do for my mother in Halle just as well as for your father in England. I hate waste, Celia, and letter-paper is dear.’

I have said that Herr Walter’s most remarkable gift was that of ubiquity. It would therefore have been natural enough that the two girls should meet him on their way from the Golden Lion to the Conservatorium—so foreign singing-schools are called, presumably because they are for the most part such intensely Conservative institutions. But, as it happened, they did not meet Herr Walter.

Helped and guided by Lotte, Celia made her first acquaintance with the inside of her new world. The courtyard that had been the general rendezvous yesterday was still busy in a quiet way; a group of girls sat talking on the rude stone bench by the low, old-fashioned doorway, and other groups were standing or moving about on their way out or in. Many eyes fell upon Celia without the grown-up affectation of not looking, and she was glad of Lotte’s company—it took off the rough edge of the stares.

Herr Von Brillen, who was to take her up where her father had left her, was in his class-room smoking a very bad cigar, which he did not remove from his mouth when the girls entered. He was a middle-aged, strongly-developed German, with an imperfectly-shaved face, a full lymphatic figure, and a mass of colourless hair pushed as far back as possible and hiding his coat-collar. His manner was also colourless, and his speech almost painfully laboured and slow.

‘Miss March, out from England?’ he asked in German English. ‘I know England. I have gezung there. They bay beautiful—oh, beautiful—but they are behind. Never mind, they will go on. They believe in Mendelssohn; that is the great thing. Who has taught you in England?’

Celia felt half relieved, half sorry, that Lotte had left her alone. She knew her voice would have to be tried, and the presence of an audience of one would have been intolerable; but, all the same, these constant efforts to face stranger after stranger were becoming greater and greater every time. And she had never tried to sing a note except

to her father ; her voice had never been heard even by Deepweald.

‘ My father,’ she said, in a half whisper, and with an awkward tightening in her throat that augured ill for the success of her début.

‘ Your father ? I have not heard of him. Is he professor ?’

‘ He is an organist.’

‘ And so he has taught you to zing. Very good. Now we will zee. . . . Good morning. There is enough to-day.’

It was over at last ; she looked round and saw Lotte, who must have come in unseen and was waiting for her own turn. Lotte nodded to her a smiling *au revoir*, and she crept out homewards, feeling that all her father’s life had been thrown away so far as she was concerned. Never in all her life had she sung so ill.

She made a bold dash, and got quickly through the courtyard. But she was not to escape so easily. Half-way to the Golden Lion she heard Herr Walter’s voice behind her.


‘ Good morning, Miss Celia. Well, and what do you think of us all now ?’



That was just the question, what did she think of it all? What does a child think when it first becomes conscious that its cradle is not the whole of the universe? As nobody can remember, nobody can say.

‘I think I shall like Lindenheim very much,’ said Celia, in a tone that meant, ‘I don’t think I shall like it at all; but, after all, what has liking to do with things?’

‘Of course you will. I mean you to. I’ve had pretty well enough of it all myself, but I fancy I get all the fun out of a place quicker than you will. You will work hard, and as there are exactly three hundred and sixty-five ideas in Lindenheim, you will be a whole year travelling from one end of the groove to another. I ran through them all like a spendthrift long ago. I know what everybody will do and what everybody will say. I can tell to a hair’s breadth how many sheets of paper the Herr Director will lay on the music-stool to regulate his height to his humour when he plays. You have been with Von Brillen? I can go through your lesson with you note by note, and word by word. When you went into his room he was smoking,



and his cigar was exactly an inch and a quarter long—that is the only mystery that keeps me at Lindenheim now, how it is that Von Brillen manages always to keep his cigar at exactly that length without ever lighting a fresh one or throwing a stump away. Then he laid it down on the highest F in the piano, gave his hair a shake, and said, “Now, mein Fräulein.” You—let me see—you felt as if your career had turned to a precipice, and you were standing on one leg on the edge of it, and somebody told you to jump down. Tell me truly—didn’t you feel a terrible awe of Von Brillen? Then there goes the first of your three hundred and sixty-five ideas; I assure you you will never feel it again. Then he tried your voice up and down and all over, and when he had done with you he took up his cigar, which had never gone out, and said, “So.” Is not that a photograph for you?

‘Well, I did feel afraid. But he did not say “So.” He said——’

‘Impossible! Von Brillen never finished a first lesson without “So”—except once, by-the-way, and then he said nothing at all.’

‘He did say nothing at all.’

‘But that was to a girl who could sing better than he could teach her. And he said nothing to you? Miss Celia, I must hear you sing. Why, for Von Brillen to say nothing at a first lesson is higher praise than you will ever get if you turn into another Malibran. Yes; I somehow thought you were different from other girls.’

That is the most terrible accusation that can be brought against the shy—it is the very secret of their shame.

‘You seem getting great friends with Lotte,’ Walter went on, without noticing the wound he had given her—which, indeed, he was unlikely enough to comprehend. ‘I am glad of it; she is a wonderfully kind-hearted girl, and as good as gold. Her nonsense doesn’t go deeper than her chatter. One gets to know something about girls, you see, in the mixed-up sort of way we live here. I’m glad I met you to-day, Miss Celia, for I’m going to make you an offer. Yes—don’t stare like that, or you’ll put me out—I mean what I say; a real offer. You have got the right sort of friend, who will keep you alive and

.

won't lead you into mischief, and now you must be kept from drifting into any. There are all sorts of people here, I can tell you. You must have a regular flirtation, one that all the world can see. I've been thinking a great deal about you; you're all at sea in strange waters, and I don't see what else is to be done. So I offer you my services. You must have somebody to give you flowers, and talk to you at concerts, and look after you on holidays; if you don't, you'll be talked about: and if you let everybody flirt with you all round, that would never do. Ask Lotte if it isn't so. And then, while you and I are together in Lindenheim we will be the most model and faithful pair ever known—and after that we will go our own ways, you to glory, and I—well, down the next turning.'

Celia had heard of flirtation. The word was not altogether unknown in Mrs. Swann's drawing-room, nor unheard of even at Dorcas meetings. But she had never heard it spoken of as an article of prudence, especially by Miss Hayward. She did not know what to think. Could this brilliant young man—for such he was in her eyes—want in earnest to devote

himself to her, Celia March, as the Reverend Reginald Gaveston devoted himself to Bessy Swann ? The thought made even her ignorant heart beat. She was not sure she even liked him, and was certainly half afraid of him ; but there was sweetness in the thought that she would after all cease to be so utterly unlike all other girls, and that somebody, no matter who, would be at her side to protect her. It was the most infinitely delicate feeling, not even so much as the first faint breath of a possible love-dream. She did not even mistake his offer, as he called it, for anything more than the mere outcome of kind-heartedness that it professed to be. It made her indeed flush and flutter with a new sensation, as one may suppose a copse does on the last day of winter ; for, as a mere piece of kind-heartedness, it was a new thing. Whatever it was not, it was a gleam of real sunshine.

‘ That is a bargain, then,’ said Herr Walter, a little less lightly and a little more warmly. ‘ I, Walter Gordon, take thee, Celia March, for better, for worse, so long as—we are both in Lindenheim. You shall receive flowers from nobody but me, and I will take care you

are never without them. If you ever want advice or don't know what to do, you must come to me or Lotte. You needn't talk more than you like ; Lotte and I will take that off your hands. But you haven't said "yes" yet. Is it a bargain—a match, I should say? Very well—let silence be assent, then,' he said with a smile not altogether free from a young man's natural vanity who finds himself, however slightly, a woman's master ; he was not yet old enough for the sensation to have lost its rarity, if indeed such a thing ever happens. That feeling in a man's heart never fails to beautify the plainest girl, and in fact and in truth Celia at that moment looked almost pretty. Spring had touched her, though with the most delicate and airy of wands.

## OVERTURE. III. ROME.

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### CHAPTER IX.

#### CINDERELLA.

ONE all-important formality has been omitted from the process of this history. Fortunately the error may be amended. It lies in not having set out with those essential words, 'Once upon a time.'

Once upon a time, then—that is to say, when Miss Hayward of Deepweald was a child in arms and the Reverend Reginald Gaveston unborn—the same sun that was afterwards to bake Mrs. Swann's Dorcas meeting, shone, much more brightly, though less hotly, into a very different sort of room.

Room, indeed, is hardly the name for it. It was an immense loft, darkened by loop-holes, long and wide enough for a granary, but so low that a short man could touch its black rafters without having to stand on tiptoe. The floor, uncarpeted, was as black as the rafters; half its planks were loose, and all were rat-eaten; every dusty sunbeam was needed to save the wariest feet from the innumerable traps that the rats and mice had set for their human enemies. Of furniture, in the sense of the word accepted by the Swanns, there was none. But, nevertheless, the room was crowded with furniture calculated to turn many an honest man into a kleptomaniac, and small blame to him.

The very blackness of the rafters was half hidden by gorgeous draperies of lace, old and yellow enough to turn a sane man into a collector, and to drive a collector into acute frenzy. There was a sort of poetry about the very recklessness with which the exquisite treasures of web-work were seemingly left to moulder in such a hole, and to set off the blackness of old timber instead of the whiteness of young shoulders. It must have been



a sorrow to the sun itself, whenever he managed to get a fair peep through a loop-hole, to miss on each occasion another priceless scrap of foliage or tracery that had gone to make a new bed for the mice behind the panel. Nor had all of it the advantage of hanging from the rafters. Much more was heaped and squeezed into corners, where its delicate beauty was invisible even to the sun, and there left to grow black and mouldy. Nor was the lace all. In other corners, and hung from other rafters, were piles and draperies of gold brocade and embroidery, as if the owner of the loft had robbed a cathedral and was unable to get rid of his plunder; even the lace had an ecclesiastical mildew about it, and suggested the adornment of cardinals rather than of queens. It was all a set-out of old clothes indeed, but of a sort to throw a glory over Rag Fair for ever.

The sun, in his struggles to look in, had only one more thing to see. One magnificent lace veil, and one only, was where it ought to be—was turning a live girl into the statue of a bride. Her face was turned away from the light, but her pose and her figure were incon-

sistent with anything but beauty of feature, by every law of harmony. She probably appeared taller, under the low roof, than she really was, but she was at any rate of full woman's height, and was as stately as a Juno of seventeen. Her absolutely motionless attitude was as perfectly graceful as if she had been in the habit of standing for Juno to sculptors all her days—it only lacked one grace that can be thought of. It was the grace of unconsciousness. Though the room was empty of all life but her own and the spiders', it was quite clear that she had one very zealous admirer there, who was not a spider. Unless, indeed—and it looked likely—she was herself the magical spinner of all those wonderful lace cobwebs that hung around her. Only in that case she must have been hundreds of years old. She stood thus motionless for many minutes in the midst of her web, with no sign of life in her but the slow rise and fall of the veil that covered her from head to foot ; then she faced slowly round to the light, and suddenly, as if moved by an inspiration of caprice, tore off the lace, crumpled it up, threw it across the

room into one of the farthest corners, grasped a window-bar with each hand, and looked out at nothing.

There was a want of harmony between her face and her figure, after all. Her features did not suggest Juno ; at any rate not according to the classic ideal, although her eyes were large and dark and very beautiful. She was olive-skinned, without any of the bloom of her age, and even hungry-looking. The outlines of her face were clear and well marked, though not boldly ; her expression was placid, dull, and without charm. It showed none of the self-conscious self-admiration that had been so remarkably legible through the veil. But, in spite of all it wanted, it was a face that might easily look beautiful every now and then, perhaps—under happy conditions—grow beautiful altogether. She had, at any rate, the beauty of contrast. Her dress, which the wonderful lacework had just covered, was made up of a dark blue flannel jacket, buttoned at the neck and loose about the body and arms, and a well-worn, rather short, skirt of black stuff—a slovenly sort of costume that made her marvellous

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statuesque grace a splendid triumph over difficulties. She had no ornaments but her eyes.

The room was quiet—not with the comparative stillness of Deepweald, but utterly. The rats were presumably asleep; there was no wind to make noisy draughts through the cracks and holes; not the ghost of a sound was to be heard. The girl was doing nothing, and seemed to have nothing to do. And so—it was only natural—she grasped the bars more tightly, drew herself back, and yawned desperately. Then she pulled a handful of nuts from the pocket of her skirt, cracked them with her teeth, and munched them slowly.

It says little for her taste, though much for her teeth, that she should try such a means of keeping off ennui, with so many treasures of skill and antiquity lying round her. And at last even this failed; she took to dropping her nuts one by one out of window, and trying how far the bars allowed her to see them fall, which was no more than a yard or two. Suddenly, with the same quick gestures with which she had thrown off the

veil, she went to another corner of the room, pulled an embroidered chasuble from one of the dustiest corners, threw it over her shoulders, and stood in the largest sunbeam she could find, so that the gold threads might glitter as much as possible. Then another impulse seized her—she untwisted the tight knot into which her dark hair was coiled, let it fall down over her shoulders and mix with the gold threads and the purple. Only one possible thing was left to be done. She pulled down a large square of lace from the nearest rafter, twisted it round her head turbanwise, routed in another corner till she found a triumph of wood-carving in the shape of an ancient Venetian looking-glass, and looked sadly and lovingly at her grotesque head and shoulders. She must have stood thus for at least ten minutes ; and not once did she yawn.

At last, however, she laid down the mirror and sighed. She had fought ennui with her very last weapon ; there was nothing more to be done ; or at any rate she looked for nothing more to do. Without taking off her turban or her chasuble, she sat down on the floor.

rested her chin upon her knees, and embraced them with her arms. And still the room remained as silent as if she were the only living creature whom the house contained.


As she sat there and basked lazily, the warmth seemed to make a humming in her ears. And indeed a distant sound, not unlike that of the sea, had been imperceptibly rising from without upon the dark background of silence. It seemed to travel in upon the sunbeam, as if that were a conductor of sound. It was a confused noise, and very far away. Suddenly, when she seemed dropping off to sleep, the girl sprang to her feet and said aloud to herself:

‘ I must, and I will !’

In a hurry, as if making up for lost time or afraid that her resolution, whatever it was, might run away before she could follow it, she threw off her finery, twisted up her hair before the looking-glass with one sweep of her arms and without lingering more than was needful, and then began to toss over the contents of the room as if they were the commonest rags in the world. Every now and then she looked at one carefully, and

paused ; but she always threw it back into the heap until, at last, she discovered a mantilla of black Spanish lace, such as the greatest lady in the land of romance would be proud to wear. She threw it over her head hurriedly, drew the front more than half over her face, and the rest round her in folds, so as to hide her dress as much as possible. With this addition to her natural grace skilfully arranged about her she opened the creaking door of the room, and ran down a staircase that was well-nigh pitch dark though it must have been nearly noon. At the bottom of the stairs she spent nearly ten minutes in opening an elaborately locked and barred door, closed it again, and was at last out of that seemingly deserted house of dust and darkness, and in the open air.

She came out into a narrow lane of tall houses, mostly with shops or rather booths under them. And here was a new strangeness: though it was plainly a street of traffic, she was still as solitary as she had been in the loft with her nuts and her looking-glass. Not a living creature but herself, not so much as a dog or a cat, was to be seen—not even



so much as that far-off sea-like murmur was to be heard. A plague in the town would not account for such utter desertion. It was not so very many years ago, for all that it was Once upon a Time ; and yet the girl in the mantilla might have stepped right out from her own singular dwelling into a by-way of the middle ages in some country unknown. The sky was beautifully blue and clear ; but only a thin strip of it was visible between the many-storied houses, with narrow holes irregularly dotted about them for windows. They were of stone, ancient and grimy with neglect ; some looked threatening to fall into ruins. But they had none of the beauty of old age, no quaint gables or carved stories—they were very old, very high, very grimy, and that was all. There was an ugly, evil look about them all ; and they exhaled an evil odour besides. The two rows of houses seemed to have met so nearly as to squeeze all the air out from between them.

If the girl had drawn the mantilla over her eyes to avoid being seen, there was little need for the precaution. Not a face appeared at a single window ; not a tradesman was in a




single shop ; not so much as a street-bird did she meet, as she walked quickly along the broken pavement of the lane. Presently she passed through a gateway in a wall. And now the reader must be blind, or unread, or untravelled indeed, if he does not recognise the city beyond the gateway. It is Rome.

Whence she had come, whether she had indeed made a step across time and distance from ages ago, matters for the present no more. The cobwebs and the silence and the solitude are suddenly swept away like a heavy dream at morning. The narrow strip expands into a real blue sky, such as people call Italian, because it is sometimes seen in Italy as well as elsewhere ; the air grows sweet and open, and life begins. And what a life it is to-day, as the girl presently finds her way upon the Corso !

It is no common everyday life, that wherein she is all at once reduced to an indistinguishable atom. A crowd of escaped lunatics is swaying and surging round and under and over a long line of open carriages, jammed up so tightly that it can hardly move even at a

snail's pace, and seemingly risking shipwreck every moment, like a fleet of boats in a storm at sea. On each side the windows have been removed bodily; the houses have bloomed out into all the colours of the rainbow, and more. And the people on foot, in the carriages, and in the open houses, are not men and women to-day. Whether demons, harlequins, bears, nymphs, or plain masques, or what not, they are all children, and mad children, into the bargain. In a word, it is not only Rome, but Rome at the very height of the last day of the Carnival.

I am not going to paint for the thousand-and-first time the humours of the Roman Carnival in the days—is it a sin to feel one twinge of regret for them at odd times?—before the phantom of the capital of the world had condescended to be the living capital of Italy. It may have been a somewhat disreputable ghost, but it was a merry one, and knew how to keep Carnival. The throwing of nosegays and sugar-plums was in full swing, when the girl came into the very midst of it out of her dream; and she looked as bewildered as if she had never before



dreamed such a dream or seen such a waking. If she had looked out of place in her queer home, if home it was, she was a stray fish in the very strangest of waters here—a girl without a smile, without a friend, without a flower, in the midst of laughter, universal fellowship, and a rain of roses. Even her plain black mantilla, though it was perhaps the costliest costume on the whole Corso, seemed to mark her off from the rest of the world ; and she drew it down over her face yet farther.

But she could see through it very well. And the true Carnival spirit, when fairly let loose in all its glory, was this—that not even the very gravest and dullest of fools was able to keep his heart grave for long. All the world became one in the same common madness ; it was all one laugh, and there is no sympathy like laughing together. And so it was with the girl in the mantilla before long. She had no nosegays and no sugar-plums ; but all the world seemed to be pelting them about for her as well as for itself. Now she rode in some amazing carriage, and now looked from some crimson balcony, as well by


deputy as others could in person. She was soon hedged in the corner of a doorway and did not care to move ; she had a good vantage-ground ; and as she looked the heavy look began to pass out of her eyes, and the full life round her to find its way into them.

A story-teller is like a looker-on at a Carnival. He can only describe what he sees and hears of this person or that ; of their past histories he can know nothing until he learns it from their own acts and words. But even as at a Carnival where all persons, lookers-on no less than actors, are carried away by the same impulse for the time, it is easy for him to make their immediate thoughts and fancies his own. Whatever this girl's daily life might be, it grew fainter and fainter in her mind till it became invisible and beyond guessing, while to-day's life grew and grew. It was as if she were being touched by the wand of a fairy godmother. The poor ragged skirt and jacket under that most inappropriate veil turned into the silks and satins of yonder group of laughing ladies in the crimson balcony. The doorstep on which she was standing became a finer barouche than that wherein a party of wild

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beasts and savages, commanded by Punchinello, were performing a hideous serenade to them ; and a party of rats out of the loft came to draw her in the form of cream-coloured horses. She had not a single ornament, not even such a universal thing as a pair of earrings ; but, by the same magic, somebody else's diamonds flew across the Corso on a sunbeam, and fixed themselves in her own ears. After all, none are so rich as the poor ; their possessions are not limited by possession. So complete was the transformation, that it was wonderful her clumsy boots did not turn into glass, so that all the world might see whether her feet were large or small.

She wanted no prince to admire her. The Carnival was a great looking-glass, in which she saw herself in all this glory. She was too much absorbed in the vision to be conscious of that wish, 'Oh, if this could last for ever !' which is so fatal to the gifts of fairies. Nobody spoke to her ; she stood in her corner as if the fairy godmother had given her the additional privilege of being invisible, so that nobody could see her other-



wise than as she saw herself, and thus dispel the charm.

In this glorious new self she had forgotten herself utterly, when all at once she started as if a snake had stung her, turned pale, and with one of her lightning movements covered the whole of her face and neck with the front of her mantilla. She shrank back into her corner and cowered down, so that the heads and shoulders of the crowd about her might screen her from a shrivelled-up, elderly man with a remarkable nose like a vulture's beak, who looked in face and figure as if Nature had given the dough a vicious pinch when she made him. He was crawling along, dressed in a black domino, at the extreme edge of the crowd, taking no part in its merriment; and on his arm was a short old woman, also in a domino, monstrously fat and with a face plastered all over with smiles and rouge. They crawled on past the girl's doorstep as well as the crowd allowed them, and disappeared in a cloud of confetti behind the barouche Punchinello. Then the girl lifted up her head again, but not her mantilla.

The shadow was not long that they threw

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over the Carnival. The sun went in with their coming, and at their going he came out again, more brightly than ever. The passing cloud seemed even to have given a new zest to the strange life about her.

As the hours rushed by in a moment, she saw the instantaneous vanishing of the crowd from the Corso, the rush of the race-horses like a whirlwind gone mad, and then—at another touch of the wand—came the thundering of cannon, the shouting of people, and the instantaneous reappearance of the crowd round her, exactly as it had been before. She did not notice that the daylight had begun to fade and that all the brilliant colours were turning gray and brown. And none would have thought of it in watching the lines of lamplight that ran faster and faster along the great street till at last it looked like one vast flame, throwing out sparks that fell into thousands of hands and turned into lighted candles. It was the great sight and the great laugh of all—the hour of the Mocoli. She had no light; but not the less for that she lost herself in breathless interest over the famous battle of the candles, in the blaze of

light that turned the day's masquerade into a delightful nightmare. She seemed intoxicated with the whirl of light and laughter; she threw back her mantilla and clasped her hands together——


Suddenly, through the uproar, came a clear, quiet sound of bells. Out went every light, every laugh; the Carnival itself went out in a single instant—the rats scampered home, the diamonds dropped out of Cinderella's ears, and her clothes turned to rags again under her lace veil.



## CHAPTER X.

### A CARNIVAL ROMANCE.

THE breath of the Angelus had literally blown out the Carnival. The sudden darkness and silence falling all at once, like a night in the tropics, upon the noise and brilliance of the day, were in themselves strikingly dramatic—a very coup de théâtre. But to the girl it must have been a moment of absolutely tragic bitterness. So absorbed had she grown in that bewilderingly intoxicating vision of a glorified self, that so sudden a waking, just when her dream was so deep and intense as to feel eternal, was not to be borne. It was exactly as if some Eastern enchanter had held out to her all the wealth, beauty, joy, and glory of earth, only to snatch them away



with a cruel laugh as soon as her finger-tips had touched them. But even this sudden waking, harsh and cold as it was, did not account for the scared, almost terrified glance she threw up at the darkening sky above, as she exclaimed aloud :

‘ What shall I do !’

The broad Corso was now well-nigh as empty as that unknown desert city, whence she had entered Rome in the morning. A group of grotesque figures was still flitting about here and there on its way to the masquerade at the theatre, but the prevailing solitude and silence were thus only the more strongly emphasised. The girl was alone in the corner which she had used all day as the best place for seeing, without being seen. But, even as she spoke, like a tragedy queen appealing to the night above from the night below, the deep voice of a man answered her, from somewhere near her shoulder, as if the air had taken tongue :

‘ Are you in trouble, signorina ? Can I help you ?’

She started, and covered her face closely with her mantilla. It was already too dark

to make her corner any longer of use either for seeing or hiding ; but she nevertheless shrank a little more into it, just as she had been startled by the sight of the fat scarecrow and the lean. She looked, however, through her lace ; but, even as she was concealed by her black veil, so was he by the hood of a black domino. He was just a voice and a black shadow. And the depth of the voice had a sepulchral sound to ears fresh from the passing away of the glory of the world.

‘Can I help you in any way ?’ the voice asked again.

We know that the girl’s mind was not free from fancies. And we know too, from many histories, that whenever there is a very strong temptation, a tempter is sure to be not very far away. It was easy enough for instinct to imagine in this voice from the darkness the phantom of the vanished Carnival, or perhaps its genius, with all its gifts to bestow at will. And in that case she knew very well what she craved for, and how he could help her. But she only answered :

‘No. Nobody can put the clock back again.’

‘The clock, signorina? What have clocks to do with the Carnival? And what has Time to do with Rome? Eternity does not want clocks or clock-makers. But—why should not the clock be put back if you please? What woman wills, you know. Command me, signorina.’

Voice is everything—words are nothing. Spoken in a lighter way, his speech would have been a mere scrap of badinage, such as one masker on the Corso might throw at another, and with as little point in it. But the voice made it a solemn profession of power and obedience combined. It never occurred to her, that the first duty of a girl, who is addressed in the street after dark by a strange man, is to walk off as fast as she can without running.

‘If you will take my advice, signorina,’ he said, after a pause, and in a yet graver tone if possible, ‘you will go straight home before the clock wants putting back any more. The soldiers will soon be clearing the theatre; and you are young—at least your voice is—and alone. And meanwhile, as you see, everybody is not at the theatre—I am not, for

one. Unless you are waiting for somebody who is certain to come very soon indeed, you had better go home.'

Such a speech, addressed to a Roman girl on the last night of the Carnival, was in itself an impressive peculiarity. He waited quietly for her to either move or answer. As she did neither, he said, without looking towards her, and as if addressing the now wholly deserted Corso :

'There is nothing in the world that is very wrong, except being afraid.'

Gradually she was becoming aware—without knowing it—that there was a real magic about this stranger. The penetration which perceived her distress to be genuine, was in itself a proof of innocence—that is to say, of wisdom. And even the voice and the shadow conveyed an impression of that simplicity of nature which makes itself felt and comprehended by its mere presence, and from which no woman, be she Roman or otherwise, feels inclined to run away when in need of honest aid.

'I am not afraid,' she answered. 'But I can't get in. I can't get in.'

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‘Then you are no cousin to the starling, signorina . . . . . But why cannot you get in ? And where ? Is your home a school ?’

‘No, signor.’

‘A nunnery ?’

‘No, signor !’

‘Not a prison—since you want to get in ?’

‘No, signor.’

‘An enchanted castle ?’

‘No, signor.’

‘What then ? My imagination does not pass the enchanted castle. What then ?’

She hung down her head, and answered :

‘The Ghetto.’

‘Ah, the Ghetto !’

That, then, was the town within a town whence she had come that morning—that little nest of foul, narrow streets cut off by high walls from the peril of corrupting Gentile purity, and closed every night against ingress and egress at the hour of curfew—in one word, the Petticoat-lane of Rome. The girl was indeed thrice over an exile. First, from the Land of Promise ; secondly, from Rome, the seat of the scorner ; and now from the foulness of the den of refuge appointed

by law. The deep voice at her side sounded less courteous when it said, 'Ah, the Ghetto!' The Hebrew quarter of those days was, even to the Romans themselves, better known by name, and that a very ill name indeed, than in reality. To say the best possible of it, it was not a pleasant quarter to any of the senses, unless perhaps to the eyes of persons so devoted to the particular sort of picturesqueness inseparable from dirt, as to be deaf to the perpetual squabbling of the most in-harmonious voices in the world over petty bargains, and callous to a chaos of evil odours more numerous and more inextricably confounded than the famous seventy-and-seven of Cologne.

But, if the Ghetto was not savoury to Roman Gentiles, those days were far less pleasant—apart from scudi—to Roman Jews. They remembered the times, when not bare-backed horses but naked Jews were made to race along the Corso, in honour of Shrove Tuesday. And, though the barbarous game was, in its quadruped form, a Gentile pastime, it was still paid for by a subscription levied on the Ghetto. Each terrified horse

that ran with bleeding sides still represented the Carnival chastisement of a Jew. The Roman Jews were still, by way of yet more intolerable punishment, driven in a herd to be converted by a dull sermon every Holy Cross day, and that at so small a fee per head that the most habitual convert hardly grew the richer. It was no wonder that this girl had felt so much like a caged swallow when shut up alone in her loft, on the great day when her neighbours themselves had shut up shop, even on a Tuesday, and were making Christian holiday. But far less wonder was it that the free, open life of joy and common sympathy with the outer world, wherefrom she was cut off by the walls of the Ghetto, had inspired her with fuller dreams and more eager longings than were natural even to a girl of seventeen—standing, that is to say, on the threshold of untried womanhood, when the birds in her heart are beginning to sing aloud, and the wings are breaking from her shoulders. And it was least wonder of all that, when the vision was over, that the thought of the Ghetto was something worse than a waking.



‘Do you know nobody outside the—in all Rome?’ asked her companion coldly. ‘Is there nobody who will give you a night’s shelter till the gate opens in the morning?’

She answered by a stare, as if the words of his question, as well as their accent, had been spoken in an unknown tongue.

‘Whom could I know outside the Ghetto?’

‘I should like to help you, signorina. But it does not seem to be a case for a man. There is nobody to knock down, and I don’t know a woman in all Rome. And if I did, I could not——’ He did not add, ‘ask her to give shelter to a strange Jewess from the Ghetto, whom I picked up after dark on the Corso.’ A man may not think himself a fool for believing in the honesty of a mere voice, but he must be unjust indeed if he blames others for thinking him one. ‘What is usually done when your friends find themselves locked out after dark? I suppose they are sometimes. Do they use silver keys? And if so, where do they apply them?’

‘I don’t know—I never heard.’

‘Well, I suppose I must find out then,’

said the voice, sounding as if it were very likely in unison with a shrug of the shoulders. At any rate, it was expressive enough of the acceptance of a task of good nature, as a matter of course, but unwillingly, and in the spirit of a martyr to courtesy. In short, it plainly said that its owner did not mean to act the knight-errant to stray girls, either on the Corso or elsewhere, again. 'Come,' he said, a little impatiently, 'I dare say the gate of the Ghetto is like every other gate I have ever heard of, and wants nothing but one drop of oil of silver to make the hinges turn.'

'You mean you can get them to open the gate?'

'No, signorina. But I can try, and shall most likely——'

'Then—oh no, signor!'

Just as his voice had suggested a shrug of the shoulders, so hers, in its sudden eagerness, must have been accompanied by an unseen clasping of hands.

'Come, this is nonsense, signorina. You were just now crying out because you could not go home; and now you say, "Oh no," as soon as you think you can. Do you mean

you have spent all your money on sugar-plums and candles? Of course you have; and as I have not, I must spend it on something. You can pay me when we meet next. Come, do you want to stay in the streets till to-morrow?

‘I have no home, signor. None now. None to-morrow!’

‘Then I am afraid I cannot help you. Felicissima notte, signorina.’

It may be that she had lost her faith in his being an actual magician. But he was an undoubtedly human voice, and a strong one; and that is better than a mere straw to cling to in the dark.

‘I—I dare not go home!’

He turned back before he had made a second footstep.

‘You dare not? I said just now there is no harm in anything but being afraid. Why dare you not go home?’

‘I—I was left in the house to keep off the rats—when they went out to see the Carnival——’

‘Who went out—the rats? I beg your pardon, signorina.’

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‘And now they are back again and have found me gone. And what shall I do? What will become of me? I could not help it, signor! I could not, indeed.’

To each other, they were but voices talking to one another out of the darkness, hinting at possible gestures now and then, but otherwise as incorporeal as echoes. To us, they are as yet nothing more. But there is a marvellous influence about the mere presence of certain men. And there are moments when an impulsive nature, whether in the north or in the south, is unable to contain itself, and loses shyness in an overwhelming passion for sympathy. The glorious day-dream seemed to have left her this stranger’s voice alone as a last thread to cling to before it floated away hopelessly and for ever.

‘And I would not!’ she burst out volubly, almost defiantly, as if appealing to the whole newly-discovered world. ‘I had never seen a Carnival. I had never been outside the Ghetto since I was born. I never thought of it; it never came in my head till to-day. But to-day! Why, I felt the sun run

through me like a hot knife as I sat among the lace—I wanted—I don't know what, signor. Other girls have been outside the Ghetto, and have told me things—but oh! nothing like what I have seen! The beautiful dresses—and I know what they have cost, by St. Bacchus! to a yard—and the diamonds, signor, all in real ears! And now it is all over; and the rats—and oh, signor, what will become of me? How could I tell that they rang Ave Maria to-day, and brought the night down, sooner than any other day in all the year?"

In the eagerness of her speech, her mantilla fell back from her face. And his ears had no time to retain the jar they received from some of her words, for a very simple but amply sufficient reason. As her mantilla fell back, the moon shone.

He saw a young face with marvellously eloquent dark eyes, and a perfect form, all made beautiful by the magic of moonlight, and set off by the one and only dress ever invented that is and makes beautiful.

She saw the harsh, grave face of a very plain young man, without a solitary personal

advantage of either feature or stature, except a breadth of chest and shoulder fully accountable for the deep voice and atmosphere of strength that had hitherto represented him. He was not ugly. He was a great deal worse than ugly ; he was only plain. His face, closely shaved all over, according to the then fashion, and framed in the hood of his black domino, was certainly not distinguished from others by features a little larger and rougher than usual, and by a pair of small common gray eyes. And yet the influence which had first commanded the girl's wondering hope, and then her desperate trust, was rather increased by its visible expression. Not one woman in a thousand would have been attracted by his face ; but not one in a million would not have trusted it instinctively and implicitly. It was not the face of a man who is apt to look upon women. But one might be sure that those dull, gray eyes, if once drawn to a woman's, would never wander. Now they looked ; and he said, with an emphasis almost startling in a voice seemingly so inflexible :

‘ You have never been outside the Ghetto ? ’

‘Never, till to-day.’

‘Why, you can never have heard music ! Think of it ! A girl to have grown up in the very heart of the whole musical dust-heap, and never soiled by a speck of it ; as pure as if there were no opera—no Italy—no Rome even ! It is a miracle ! Can you sing ?’

‘I don’t know, signor.’

‘You don’t know ?’


‘No. I never tried.’

‘Signorina, you have a singer’s voice when you speak ; you can express feeling ; you are of the singers’ race ; and you know no music, and have never tried to sing ! For Heaven’s sake, signorina, do not say it if it is not true,’ he hurried on eagerly, as if he too had undergone a sudden transformation, and as anxiously as if all Rome’s fate, which is the world’s, hung upon her answer. ‘No—it cannot be ! And yet—is it true ?’

She could only look her amazement, and no wonder.

‘Is it true ?’

‘Why should I try to sing ? There is nobody to hear me.’



That is not what the birds say. But he did not stop to criticise.

‘Never mind why. It is true, then—a real woman, with a real voice, who has never heard a false note and never made one! No, it is not a miracle. It is destiny, and I have found her. Never mind the clock—never mind the Ghetto—never mind anything. Come!’

Her eyes opened to their widest, and asked:

‘Where?’

‘Oh, anywhere under the stars. What is your name?’

The very question was a command, and she had neither purpose nor will. Locked out from the Ghetto, all astray in strange streets, and with the atmosphere of the Carnival still hanging over her like a dream-cloud, all ways in life were for the moment one to her; and there was a mesmeric force in his brusque energy—a force to be obeyed, and that without question or fear.

And indeed if, at that moment, a fiend had risen up out of the pavement of the Corso and had thrown open any door which, by



some chance, might prove not to lead back to the Ghetto—wherever else it might lead—she would have taken him by the hand and entered.

‘Your name?’ he asked again.

‘Noëmi Baruc.’

‘Mine is Andrew Gordon. Come.’

## CHAPTER XI.

### PAN AND SYRINX.

If Andrew Gordon had called himself *Mephistopheles*, *Noëmi Baruc* would have followed him. They walked in silence along the now moonlit but still deserted streets, avoiding, either by intention or instinct on his part, all chance of meeting any part of the crowd from the theatre. It is easy enough to follow her, by throwing away all the rules and likelihoods of common waking life, and remembering how we all act and feel when we dream, and become the citizens of another country in another world. We often enter strange cities when we dream, and act strangely; and *Noëmi* had never been in Rome, although she lived there.

The scene became more dream-like every moment. The Ghetto, with its daily traffic and chatter, fell farther and farther away. The streets began to break up into indistinct masses of black shadow and silver-gray light; the houses to decay into broken walls and crumbling masses of stone, with dim vistas of darkness between them. Not a footfall was any longer to be heard but their own. Whither he was guiding her she neither questioned nor thought, nor wondered. Was she not in a dream? At last they came into an open space; and she saw rising before her a colossal mass of gray, made whiter here and there by deeper shadows, and looking like the very inmost citadel of dreamland. As they approached it, she could distinguish lines of arches piled above one another, tier upon tier. It must be a palace or a temple; but of what—gods or men? She could not help shuddering with a new awe, as her guide led her out from the open moonlight into the shadow which this ghostly pile threw upon the confused ground. It might be neither palace nor temple; it might be a tomb.

Suddenly he stopped, turned towards her, and said :

‘Sing.’

After all, there is no reason why the most unmusical of throats should not sing in a dream. Indeed, there is every reason why they should, according to dream-law. If he had told her to fly, she would not have been surprised. It did not seem to her like madness that a man, if he had a fancy to hear a girl sing in the moonlight, among ruins instead of a theatre, should choose for his purpose one who had just declared that she had never tried to sing.

‘Sing,’ he said again. ‘I must hear you.’

‘I cannot——’

‘You can ; and if you cannot, you must, all the same.’

‘What will happen if I sing?’

‘That must be seen. But sing—and think of whatever you most wish for, and it shall be yours.’

We have all heard of such offers. Sometimes they are made by creatures, mostly evil, who mean what they say and can do it ; sometimes by mere mortals with a turn for exaggeration, who only fancy they mean

what they say, and do not include a few million exceptions or so, like the inns where the guest can have anything he likes to name so long as he names eggs and bacon. But Noëmi was not in that respect like all of us, and had never heard such an offer in her life before. She had dreamed of it, of course, being human. And now that it had come, in a new and magical world, the offer seemed neither too large nor too wild. Perhaps, in that magic atmosphere, she really could sing if she tried—really, and not only as people sing in dreams—and for the sake of whatever her soul, still overflowing with its Carnival longings, most desired. And what did her soul most desire? Most certainly no longer such a simple thing as that the hands of all the clocks in Rome should work backwards, so that she might, after all, reach the Ghetto before the gate closed. Not even that she might find herself in the crowded Corso once more, with all the hours of the day still before her—no mere natural instinct ever wishes that the past may be recalled. Her heart leaped high; and, with the wildest impulse of faith in unlimited possibilities, she answered:

‘Then—a pair of gold ear-rings, signor, if you please—real gold!’


The name of Andrew Gordon will have struck familiarly upon many ears. Those who have taken the trouble to guess, are not wrong in their surmise that the very eccentric Englishman who offered Noëmi Baruc anything she pleased for a song that she could not sing, and because she could not sing, was *the* Andrew Gordon. And they need not be reminded of more than the name of the composer of *Comus*—that strange opera which, when it appeared like a musical meteor in the now extinct Phoenix Theatre in Great Queen Street, created a rage which belongs to history. *Comus* is not often heard now—English operas more than a generation old seldom are. But those who are old enough to remember it and its first night, as many still are, will feel youth come back into their hearts as they think over what might have been, and say, ‘Ah, we have no Andrew Gordons nowadays. If he had lived, Europe would have heard of an Englishman.’

That Europe has heard of a few English-

men who were not musicians is nothing to musical people, as everybody knows.

The strangest thing about the triumph of Comus was that its composer was a rich man ; rich not only in genius but in coin of the realm. More strangely still, he was the eldest son of old Gordon, of Gordon's Mill—  
—a great man in the kingdom of Cotton. Genius does take queer freaks into its head about selecting its lodgings sometimes. Old Gordon himself, of Gordon's Mill, was just musician enough to distinguish the first bar of God save the King from that of Rule Britannia. His wife, till she was past learning, had heard no music but that of machinery in full play. She had been a factory hand when old Gordon, then young Gordon, married her, neither for a pretty face nor for accomplishments, but for the more excellent qualities that eminently fitted her for the wife of a man who had risen in life, to fifteen shillings a week, from nothing a day. But a man must have some ancestors, though he may never have heard of them ; and among the grandchildren of Adam some, at least, must be the sons of Jubal. Old Gordon came

from the North, when he one day crossed from Yorkshire into Lancashire with three sixpences—not, indeed, in his pockets, for he had but one, and that was rendered unsuitable for a purse by a hole in the bottom—but safely stowed in one of his boots under his toes. His talent for climbing to the top of the ladder spoke of his undoubtedly Northern origin ; but his very un-Northern silence on the score of ancestry and the faint tinge of orange in the whites of his eyes were eloquent, to the learned in such things, of other than Scots blood in his veins. Very noble names are to be found in Yetholm, for instance, where the gipsies are ; and that one drop of tawny blood would account for any caprice on the part of his children, even to the third and fourth generation, though it had filtered through the veins of the best man of business that ever was born. Andrew Gordon himself did not in the least resemble the great nation of wandering fiddlers, and certainly would not have felt complimented by the suggestion that he had the slightest connection with a tribe of beggars and thieves, as people roughly and scornfully set down the great Romani nation






in his younger days. But, none the less, he is a wise man who knows his own father ; and, therefore, he who knows his own grandfather must be at least doubly wise.

But, whatever he was or was not, Andrew Gordon was a born musician. He also, like his father and mother, heard music in the clatter of spinning-machines. But it was not, like them, because he heard it nowhere else. It was because he heard it everywhere. Music with many, perhaps most, people, is like the sentimental part of love ; it would be an unknown thing to them if they had never read or heard of it at second-hand. Andrew Gordon had been brought up from his cradle among those who never spoke of it ; and he must, nevertheless, have heard it at absolutely first-hand, even in his cradle. Of course it cannot be really so, but music, in some mysterious manner, does appear to be a gift that some few mortals are allowed to carry with them from their former lives, and to keep with them, as a memory, when they come down to this world. Such are not dependent upon pianofortes and fiddles ; they can hear music at their own fancy, as Ferdinand

heard Ariel's upon the enchanted island, in the air.

Where there is a will, there is one way ; where there is a passion, there are ten thousand—especially when a man has no lack of money wherewith to pay for the journey. Of course, Andrew, being so utterly unlike his practical father, and his homely mother, and his steady-going brothers, was petted and indulged to spoiling point ; and when, at one-and-twenty, he rejected an active partnership in the mill, and resolved to live the life of a musician, the old man was proud rather than otherwise. After all, there was that orange tint in his eyes as a token of Bohemian sympathies, however deep and dormant they might lie. So he gave the young man a sleeping partnership, gave his next brother his birthright of activity, and let him go his own way freely.

‘He must sow his wild oats, I suppose,’ old Gordon excused himself to himself. ‘He’ll be sick of fiddling in six months, and be glad to come back to the mill again. You must put your back into it, James,’ he said to his second and steadiest son. ‘The lad



must find it easy for him when he comes home.'


James promised that he would put his back into it. But he did not express his very natural feeling that a man's back ought to work mainly for its owner, and not to make harness easier for those who like to spend the morning hours of life in play. Nor was he cruel enough to hint that, after all, perhaps the truant might not get tired of play, and might not come home. In a word, he acted like the sensible young fellow that everybody called him—he did put his back into the mill with a will, and held his tongue.

In James's case, the fancy that his brother Andrew might not come back to the mill had no better support than a wish; the father's belief, that a young man soon gets tired of any sort of life that he is freely allowed to lead, was built upon knowledge of the world. He would have been perfectly right in more than nineteen cases out of twenty. But knowledge of the world, though acquired in Lancashire, was not knowledge of Andrew.

The difference between father and son was merely verbal, but therefore all the more in

superable. It lay in the different meaning each attached to the word 'playing.'

No misgiving or regrets touched the young man, when he left the home of his boyhood ; for he had never been a boy, and had never felt himself at home. The scenes and domesticities, among which he had grown up to his exceedingly moderate stature, had never become part of him ; he had always in spirit been a stranger among them all, and had felt like a stranger. The name of London, which in those untravelling days he had never seen, sounded to his ears like the name of home to an exile, and his permission to seek his soul's fortune there like a recall from banishment. London is the modern Proteus ; it is all things to all men. To one, London means pleasure ; to another fame ; to another, the streets are still paved with gold. To the imagination of Andrew Gordon, London was music and nothing else, and he longed to throw himself into its sea. He had no ambition for himself ; he went to London that he might be a minnow among the Tritons, and lead a life of worship in the temple.



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He carried with him the golden key to all circles ; he heard music, and mixed with those who made it, as fully as his heart could desire. He set to work and cultivated himself diligently, that he might be the more fit for the society of musicians. But very soon he was surprised, and by no means pleased, to find that, ignorant apprentice as he was, the very greatest fiddlers in all London showed no objection to treat him as if he were already their equal—nay, as their superior and master. Every scrap of music that he wrote as an exercise, and showed timidly in order to have its faults exposed and explained, was invariably called a masterpiece of perfection, especially by those who had daughters to marry, or concerts to be patronised, or a taste for dining well without expense to themselves. Such an art-patron was not to be found every day as this rich young man from Lancashire. He had come to walk up the hill with brother artists, with no reward but the honour of their company ; and they had one and all agreed to make him drive up luxuriously in a chariot, with themselves for horses.

He had no knowledge of the world ; but he was absolutely flattery-proof, and that compelled him to see a little, though for a long time he resolutely shut his eyes. The musical life was to his mind so divine, that to suspect the possibility of a meanness in anybody who lived it savoured of blasphemy. It could not surely be envy that made one musician lose no chance of sneering at another, when the believer in both was by, or jealousy that made his friendship a bone of contention between friends, or self-interest that degraded his masters into his followers. Of only one thing he was sure—all these flatteries and eager friendships were due to no merits of his own. To what then could they be due ?

One day he was suddenly called upon for an opera by the manager of one of the leading theatres. There was little time to write. Half out of carelessness, half out of hurry, he turned out the contents of his desk, and threw into the open air almost the first work that came to hand. It was good enough for a trifle, he thought, such as he was asked for—for a piece of butterfly music, to serve its

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hour, and to call for a little liking, and for no serious blame.

Nor was it blamed. The first night of Comus was the grandest musical triumph in England within the memory of man. He had thrown, as he thought, a moth into the air—the world found it an eagle. He listened to the final storm of applause in sheer amaze. And then, while the manager, wild with excitement, was hunting high and low for the composer to drag him before the foot-lights, he strode off down the street in a rage, saying to himself, for all comment on his own glory :

‘Hang the composer for a humbug, and the public for a pack of fools!’

It is hard to realise, impossible to exaggerate, the bitterness of the triumph of his own Comus to Andrew Gordon. It meant to him the triumph of bad art, with himself for hero ; and that, to him, meant the throwing back of the triumph of good art for years and years to come. It never occurred to him that he could really have created a work of genius, and in little more than seven days ;




when the men about him, whose lives were given to music, only showed symptoms of creative genius at the intervals of angels' visits, and most of them never at all. He knew that with this thing, Comus, he had taken no pains, that he had worked at it as a vile task, with shame and against the grain, and that therefore it was, by every law of workmanship, justly doomed to fail. And he, who followed art like a religion, had degraded himself into the most wretched charlatan, or had, at best, allowed himself to be made the tool of one. Had Comus failed; imposture would have failed, and justice would have been done; but now——! He was the only man in all London who would not willingly have given ten years of his life for that one night of intoxicating glory; and, with well-nigh incredible perversity, he was one of the very few to whom has ever been granted the double gift of youth and triumph combined. And what could he think of those who had crowned him, after seeing an audience, of that high order which listens indifferently to the finest music, go literally raving mad over his Comus—his, Andrew

Gordon's ? Could music be but a monstrous piece of humbug after all—those who make it, cheats, and those who think they love it, fools ?

The next day he stayed at home, denied himself to all visitors, would not look at a newspaper, and threw all his letters unopened into the fire. The next, he shook from his feet the dust of a city which had given such a welcome as this to an impostor who had only meant to tickle a few ears for a week, and cheat them of a few guineas for charity's sake, and had intended even in that to fail as he deserved. There was nothing for him now but to go abroad for a time, till he and Comus were alike forgotten, and his life made clean again from its stain.

Of course he went to Italy. Italy was then considered a musical country. And of course—it need not be said—disappointment followed him there also. He began to suspect, at last, that Music, like her sister Painting, had died before he was born. But, if so, what a career, or rather what a religious duty, lay before the man who saw this clearly ! For surely music could not really die ; she




could, at her very lowest, be but the sleeping beauty in the wood, waiting for the prince to come. It was with awe, and not without much misgiving, that he began consciously to devote his life to the work of cleansing the Augean stables of their defilement, and turning them into a pure temple.

Gradually he mapped out the rest of his life, like a monk making his vows. That was needful; for art is so long and life so short, that every moment had to be rigidly economised and strictly accounted for. He was to keep his name, for many long and patient years, from ever being known or heard. He must keep his purpose secret; for he now knew the world well enough to be aware of the advantages of being a monomaniac, and the disadvantages of being thought or called one. So many years of his life, calculated as nicely as possible, were to be spent in making himself master of all the means whereby the great masters of old time worked out their results, and sent them straight from the mind to the heart without depending upon noise or machinery. So long again he was to meditate upon the nature of a perfect work to be the

standard of perfect art in all its branches, and fix the point from which all music hereafter, in order to be right and true, must spring; the perfect figure of pure music, stripped of all her tricks and disguises, and, by her very aspect, abolishing for ever the devices of tradesmen and charlatans. . And then, at last, the great work must be begun, ended, and finished—and then, and not till then, it must be revealed to the world. And then, if glory came to him therefrom, he would welcome it without shame; if not, he would be content that his work was done.

It was the dream that is called madness when it fails, genius when it wins. And now, while looking into the dark eyes of Noëmi under the moonlight, his grand hope took a yet more definite form. A strange Carnival-trick of fate had brought him a beautiful girl, young enough to wait full twenty years for her prime, as pure as a new-born child from modern so-called music and all its ways, of the land where people have voices, and of the race that can use them. If she only had the possibilities of a voice and the shadowiest ghost of a soul, she must have been expressly



made for the chief instrument of his great work. He might make of her whatever he pleased—into more even than the equal of the great singers whose glory has not died with their songs, because they never sang until they could sing.

When one is young, all fine eyes have souls and can sing.

He promised the ear-rings without noticing that the request might imply another sort of soul than he was bargaining for, and then, by making her imitate as well as he could the very unmusical notes of his own deep and inflexible voice, satisfied himself that she had a tongue fit for tuning. He made her sit beside him on a fragment of marble; and she, with imagined gold ear-rings dangling in the air before her eyes, tried to sing them into being.

Noëmi's had not been the only heart on the Corso that felt a cold sinking when the withered old man and the fat old woman crawled by. For holidays, alas! have to be paid for—or at any rate people think so; and there would have been far less finery on

people's backs that day and a great deal less merriment in the air, if more peace of pocket, had it not been for that pair of scarecrows. In a word, the lean scarecrow was no less a person than Signor Giuda Laragna, of the Ghetto.

Now the Jews of the Ghetto are not as a rule rich, and most are poor. But Signor Giuda Laragna was reputed to be worth the weight, not of himself, for that would be nothing, but of his wife, in gold. He was a dealer in bric-à-brac, but he kept no shop and was never known to sell anything. Indeed, his customers mostly carried away with them more money than they brought him. A business conducted on such principles sounds more philanthropical than profitable. But there are back stairs to the court of Plutus as well as to any other ; and how he came by so many treasures of costume, considering the ecclesiastical cut of many of them, the saints and the cousins of cardinals alone could tell. In short, Signor Giuda Laragna was the most famous money-lender in Rome, except—for it is always right to be strictly accurate—one rival, who, being a Christian and a

Gentile, had more opportunities and advantages than were open to a citizen of the Ghetto. Their clients called Giuda Laragna 'Il Purgatorio,' and his rival, Demetrio Colombo, they called 'L'Inferno.' 'Il Paradiso' was not at that time represented by any usurer in Rome.

But on that especial day, however it might be faring with L'Inferno, it was Il Purgatorio himself who was in purgatory. The many sufferers from the disease of cent. per cent. seized the chance of applying to the Carnival that rule of its ancestor, the Saturnalia, that permitted slaves to turn the tables on their masters. Many a snake in the shape of a jest could easily be hidden under the innocent-looking cover of sweetmeats and flowers. There is a real, literal, practical magic about a crowd everywhere, on the Corso no less than in Trafalgar Square. It not only has the art of appearing and vanishing and re-appearing in an instant at any given spot, but, according to its temper, is provided at any given moment with materials that may be roses or rotten eggs at will. No rotten eggs, indeed, appeared on the Corso. But,



by some strange conjuring trick, whenever Il Purgatorio and La Purgatoria happened to approach a carriageful of masked young men, the bouquets and sugar-plums wherewith they had been pelting the ladies in the windows invariably turned to squirts and parched peas.

The crew of wild beasts under the command of Punchinello especially distinguished itself in this surpassing witty proceeding; and they were so grotesquely and completely disguised, or rather so openly revealed in their true nature as bears, that their fun was even better than humorous—it was safe into the bargain. Not one need fear revengeful recognition when he next came to ask for time. By the time the couple had slowly traversed the length of the Corso, their dominoes were nearly drenched, and their faces were red with the stings of peas. But never once had Il Purgatorio hastened his crawl, nor La Purgatoria relaxed one atom of her incessant smile. Morally, they might have been carved out of wood for any effect that these jests at their expense seemed to have upon them.

But when the Corso cleared itself for the horse-race, then said Il Purgatorio :

‘It’s a good Carnival! How many peas did you get in your face, Salome? You counted them?’

‘I couldn’t count the peas,’ she said, with a still broader smile if anything. ‘There were too many. But I kept account of the times. It was just two hundred and eighty-three. And a good dose each time.’

‘Two hundred and eighty-three! I got no more than two hundred and thirty-nine—but then your face is ever so much broader than mine. It gives twice as good an aim. Why, what with those that didn’t hit and scattered, they must have used all the peas on the Corso; and then the syringes—it has been quite a stroke of business, Salome! Ah, it would never have come into Colombo’s thick skull to send such wares as that on to the Corso at the feast of fools! They’ve paid better than candles or confetti. I saw the fools buying them up like wildfire as soon as they saw you, Salome, within fifty yards of them——’

‘You, Giuda,’ smiled La Purgatoria.

‘No, you, Salome. But never mind; I know every mask in Rome, and every man that shot a pea will have to pay for it more than twice over before he’s done. It was quite an idea; I didn’t think it would turn out half as well. Next year I’ll send a whole shipload of damaged oranges on the Corso. You won’t mind a few oranges in your face, Salome? I’ll take care they’re all soft ones—and it’s only once a year.’

They did not wait for the Mocoli. There could be no possible profit in walking unrecognised in the twilight—no doubt all the stock of squirts and peas had been exhausted already, and not even Il Purgatorio himself could do anything to increase the natural expenditure in candles. They turned their steps towards the Ghetto, and reached the gate well before curfew. Presently they reached the narrow street where stood the dilapidated, gloomy house whence Noëmi had issued in the morning. The master raised his crutch-handled stick and struck three times, regulated like a signal, upon the door. After waiting about a minute, he struck again—the same three blows with

the same measured interval after each of them.

They waited another minute. Then,

‘Noëmi!’ called out the mistress in a shrill voice, that must have been heard across the Tiber. ‘Noëmi!—Are you asleep there?—Noëmi!’

Thrice more her husband knocked, but always in vain. He looked at his wife, and she back at him, with only so much of her smile left as had become chronic from persistent practice. The Ghetto was the safest and honestest corner in all Rome—except, of course, the uninhabited catacombs—and the Carnival was an honest time. But, nevertheless, somebody might have taken advantage of the holiday desertion of the Ghetto, to play some trick upon its richest citizen with instruments worse than syringes or dried peas.

It was a terrible thought. Noëmi might be murdered instead of only sound asleep, and the whole house plundered. La Purgatoria took hold of the iron handle of the door and shook it. In her shaking she gave it a push; it flew open and sent her

flying into the dark entrance with her head far before her heels. Her husband caught his toes in her skirt, and flew after her through the door like a bat, with his black domino flying open into the likeness of wings.

They extricated themselves from one another as they best could, rubbed their heads, and again looked at one another in too much dismay for immediate anger. Even the chronic remnant of her smile had, at last, been knocked out of the face of La Purgatoria. When they left in the morning for the Corso, that treacherous door had been barred, bolted, and chained as fast as door could be. And now it was open—and, what was worse, had been opened from the inside.

That meant that Noëmi was not murdered.

As if by the most wonderful magic of all that magical day, Il Purgatorio seemed all at once to lose his decrepitude, and La Purgatoria her unwieldiness. They scrambled and raced up the dark stairs. Presently they found a light, and went into every room. They found nothing, but they missed nothing, which was far stranger. At least they found

nothing but a few nut-shells in the loft, and missed nothing but Noëmi.

‘There is really nothing gone then?’ asked La Purgatoria.

‘Nothing,’ said Il Purgatorio grimly. ‘Go down and chain up the door.’

‘And when the girl comes back?’

‘She may come back; but she won’t get in. Charity doesn’t mean being obliged to keep a girl that opens the door to all the thieves and brigands in Rome, as soon as one’s back’s turned for an hour. It isn’t her fault that there’s the worth of a scudo left—it makes one creep to think of! Oh yes, she may come, and welcome, and break her knuckles on the door if she likes—it won’t open so easy to her as it did to me.’

‘I’m sorry, though—we shall never get a girl so cheap—never again. She ate next to nothing, and never asked for more. There’s the bread and the slice of sausage, that I left her for her dinner, unbitten to this hour. It has been a real charity to keep a girl like Noëmi.’

‘All I say is, you’ll have to do everything yourself now, Salome. I’ll never trust

another ; and as for her, I've done with her.  
Ah !

They were standing in the dimly-lighted loft, surrounded by the wilderness of wonderful old clothes. Argus himself could not have distinguished one rag from another, where they lay heaped up together in every nook and corner. But the eyes of Argus were, as everybody knew, nothing to those of Il Purgatorio, where the worth of a far-thing was concerned.

‘What is it?’ exclaimed La Purgatoria breathlessly.

‘If she’s a hundred leagues away,’ cried out her husband, ‘I’ll drag her back, and when she comes back I’ll send her — a thousand leagues away! Look, Salome—look there!’

She looked ; but her eyes were dim, not to say blear.


‘I see nothing—what, Giuda ?—where?’

‘That’s it—you see nothing. You don’t see the black lace mantilla—it’s gone! Old Spanish lace made by the nuns in Cordova. I was going to sell it to the Queen of Naples, and it’s gone. It’s worth every thread in

gold, and it's gone off on a beggar's back, and I shall never see it again.'

'But she can be stopped; there's the law——'

'A rotten orange for the law! Oh yes, the law will stop the girl, sure enough, but I don't want the girl; I want my mantilla. Do you think the law would let a thing like that, worth a gold piece for every thread, go back to the Ghetto? If you do, Salome, you're a fool. They'd ask me questions about that mantilla; and if I told the truth, they'd keep it; and if I told them lies, they wouldn't let me have it back again. But I will have it back—and therefore I won't go to law; but I'll follow Noëmi all over the world till I do. Charity, indeed! A rotten orange for charity! I see; it is a trick of that scoundrel Colombo. He has bribed my own servant to plunder me. He will give her a promise, and get my profit out of the Queen of Naples. But I'll be even with him—him and her. Great Heaven! I have lost the grandest piece of lace in all the world for the price of a parched pea!'






It is an infinitely wonderful thing, the way in which two lives will set out from opposite poles, travel by diverging roads, and yet—contrary to all the laws of mathematics—meet in the same point, more surely than if they had originally started from the same. Andrew Gordon had started from a cotton-mill in Lancashire, had made a short but exciting voyage through intense enthusiasm, violent success, bitter disappointment, and renewed visions of coming glory. Noëmi had set out from the Roman Ghetto, as the orphan dependent upon the charity of a couple of misers and usurers ; had never even heard of such a thing as art, nor even of an outer world save from the gossip of neighbours. And yet, if they had set out from the same point and travelled by the self-same road, they would not have arrived together under the shadow of the Colosseum on that Shrove Tuesday. It was their divergence that had brought them there.

Long before the moon went down Gordon satisfied his most anxious doubts, that he had found in Noëmi all that his vision of the future still lacked of perfection. Her voice,

as he had hardly dared to hope in spite of her eyes, proved, after a very few experiments, to need only the tuning and moulding of a master, in order to become an instrument fit even for him, and to express the great music that was to be. But more even than in her voice he rejoiced in the ignorance that had kept her from being spoiled by others, and in the poverty that might deliver her to him. She was surely the very reed that grew without a voice by the river-side, blown this way and that by the wind, a mere lifeless thing, until Pan came and drew such music from it that the whole world listened and wondered.

He talked to her as men who are the slaves of one overwhelming idea talk to others—that is to say, as if their one idea were the one idea of all creation. He talked of things whereof she had never heard or dreamed—far over her head, and up among the clouds, where she could no more follow him than she could literally fly. But it all sounded very grand, like part of the Carnival. At last he said, suddenly and in the same tone of command in which he had bidden her follow him from the Corso :



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‘ You will not go back to the Ghetto ? ’

Not she ! She had not followed him above the clouds ; but she had been able to follow him very well—half way. After all, one does not gossip with one’s neighbours, even in the Ghetto, without learning something. She had not heard of art, but she had heard of artists. She had never been to the opera, but she knew all about the opera-house ; some of those very neighbours were chorus-singers themselves. Combined with these hints, he made her understand very well that the life of a great singer was all made up of liberty, joy, plenty to eat and drink, nothing to do, velvets, satins, ear-rings, brooches, and scudi—in a word, that it was all one eternal Carnival, such as she had seen to-day. As Gordon talked, the ear-rings he had promised her grew from gold to diamond. And could all this be for her—her, Noëmi Baruc of the Ghetto, the slave of *La Purgatoria* ?

Pan was breathing a soul into Syrx—with a vengeance. And so ended for both of them that romance of a Carnival. Or rather, so it began.

## BOOK I.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FIVE ADZES.

‘GREAT Job, the god of thunder,  
And March, the god of war,  
And Neptune with his tried ’un,  
Apollyon with his cur—  
And all the gods terresteral  
Ascended on their spears,  
To view with ad-mi-ra-ti-on  
The British Grennydiers.’

The singer took advantage of the chorus to  
bury his face modestly in his pewter tankard,  
and then went on again to the same tune :

‘Some talk o’ Harry Saunders,  
And some o’ merry glees ;  
Of coal, and Alice Andrews,  
And all such folks as these.

But it is my opinion,  
There's none for to compear,  
With that brave and ancient Nero,  
The British Grennydier.'

And once more the singer made up during the chorus for the enforced abstinence of his solo.

It was a furiously wet night without. The rain was coming down in a torrent, nay, in a deluge, and a battery of hail rattled on the windows. Altogether it was a fine atmosphere of contrast, for those who had the good fortune to sit round the long deal table within. They were not of those who want cushions and backs to their chairs. Long, bare, wooden forms did as well for them as for their grandfathers—for their great-grandfathers for that matter. For The Five Adzes had been known in the parish of Laxton—Lass'n, as the natives called it—from time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. The oldest inhabitant had sat on a deal form in the parlour of The Five Adzes, and had never dreamed of a time when not even one adze had been hung out for a sign.

I am half ashamed to admit that the floor

was sanded. Nobody likes to admit that his reader has guessed rightly; but truth is truth, and must be told. Not only so, but the room had a chimney-corner—and altogether the room was the most conventional bar-parlour that even that creature of conventions, the teller of stories, ever imagined, or reproduced at second-hand. It therefore needs no description. Two and two make four, and the parlour of *The Five Adzes* was the parlour of *The Five Adzes*, and there is an end. But the evening was not at an end, though it was near upon nine o'clock—a terribly late hour for *Lass'n*.

Nor, apparently was the song.

‘Whene’er we are remanded  
To storm the parish shades,  
Our leaders march with fuchsias,  
And we with——’

Suddenly, the singer stopped—not this time to bury his face in his tankard, but to stare at the door.

‘Pray don’t let me disturb you, gentlemen,’ said a pleasant voice. ‘It’s a fine song, and well sung, and I want to hear the end.’

Nor was the appearance of the new guest in the least calculated to interrupt harmony. He was a bright-looking young man of six or seven and twenty, with a fair brown beard and moustache trimmed artistically short, all gleaming, glistening, and dripping with rain, like a Triton's fresh from the sea. He shook himself like a dog just out of a pond, threw his knapsack on the end of one form and his cap on the end of another, walked straight to the chimney-corner and looked round him encouragingly, as if he were perfectly at home.

He was a few years older than when we met him at Lindenheim, but there was no mistaking the clear open forehead and the laugh left in the eyes though hidden in the new-worn beard, and the free air with which he at once accepted the situation and made himself at home. And one instinctively felt that, had he fallen on his legs in the midst of a cabinet council instead of in the parlour of The Five Adzes, he would have been no less completely at his ease.

They were quick eyes with which he glanced round, and will serve to see with

excellently. At the head of the long table was the singer; a strapping fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with velveteen jacket and gaiters—perhaps a gamekeeper. People carry their callings upon them, to eyes like Walter Gordon's. Next to him came one who was perhaps the parish clerk, more probably the parish clerk's deputy—most certainly a shoemaker. And so on, round the table, the most noteworthy persons of Lass'n who were above the rank of labourer sat and smoked long churchwardens, and buried their noses from time to time in tankards of ale. They neither laughed nor smiled, with the exception of one man whose smile was indelible.

'He is the sexton,' thought Walter Gordon.

The people of Lass'n were not more given to inhospitality than their neighbours, but when men meet together, night after night, to drink ale out of the same old tankards, and to listen to the same song, without seeing a stranger from year's end to year's end, an intruder is safe to be an element of discord. The song had grown accustomed to certain pairs of ears, and felt shy when called on to make the old, familiar impression on a new

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pair however ready and willing. The British Grenadiers, for once in their history, lost courage. In fact, all but Walter Gordon were habitués of The Five Adzes; and yet Walter Gordon alone seemed to be at home. It is true he had his back to the chimney-corner; and that gives a man an advantage everywhere.

‘You look a bit dampish, master,’ said the deputy parish clerk after long deliberation, and critically.

‘Well, that’s no reason I should act like a wet blanket. Come—if you don’t let me hear the end of that song, I shall go out into the rain again.’

The deputy parish clerk appeared to nudge the gamekeeper. But the gamekeeper abstractedly took a draught from his pewter and watched the cloud from his pipe like a metaphysician in a dream.

Still the rain came down with a steady sweep and rush, and the hailstones rattled against the panes. The great kitchen clock ticked as if keeping time to the music of the rain, and Walter Gordon, having filled and lighted his own pipe, stood waiting for the

inevitable eggs and bacon, and surveyed the silent parliament of Laxton. A long day's tramp over a heavy country, the clouded atmosphere of a tavern parlour, the portentous silence of his chance companions, the persistent rush of rain, and the monotonous ticking combined to bring on that feeling of satisfied fatigue which is one of the grand pleasures of those who know the feeling of a knapsack on their shoulders. Not being in love, and knowing nothing of the shyness that most men feel in the company of those whom, as their inferiors, they feel obliged to treat with condescending bonhomie, he let his thoughts travel about with the smoke of his pipe, and looked and listened at dreamy ease.

In truth, he was a man to be envied, irrespectively of the pleasures of a good appetite with the supper of a country inn before it, a temper that liked wet weather, a long tramp, and perfect peace of mind. If we know little of him, it is not because what we do not know is any secret—nothing was ever a secret about Walter Gordon since he was born. I am well-nigh as ashamed about his want of

mystery as of the commonplace, conventional picturesqueness of The Five Adzes.

He was a rolling-stone, and he gathered no moss ; but that matters nothing when it is covered with moss before it begins to roll. Gordon's Mill, since the first Gordon came over the Border with eighteen-pence in his stocking-foot, had flourished and prospered, and it prospered and flourished still. In fact, Walter Gordon had been born in the very purple of trade. He might roll a long way, even downhill, without having any of the moss rubbed from him. His father did not toil that he might spend. Hundreds of hands toiled that he might roll easily. Is it strange that he should have been found in Bohemian Lindenheim ? Not a whit stranger than that he should be standing with a wet jacket in the bar-parlour of The Five Adzes. No stranger than if he had been met in a Red Indian wigwam or an African diamond-field. Given a young Englishman with full lungs and full pocket—where is it strange to find him ? He is no Alphonse, to be looked for on the Boulevard, and, if not there, in the Morgue.

He belonged to the third generation of commerce ; that is to say, he was neither the self-made man nor the parvenu—he was of the generation that had a grandfather. And, young as he was, he had seen many sides of life, and enjoyed them all, and looked forward to enjoying many more before settling down to whatever career might suit him best after a thorough taste of the cream of each and the bitter of none. He had known Horchester and Oxford. He had played at studying law in London, medicine in Paris, philosophy in Jena, music in Lindenheim. And now he had found out that his true vocation was to be a painter. Why not ? Why should not a man, who can pay for the luxury, grasp as much life as he can in his time—why should he narrow himself in one groove, for the sake of imitating those who have the misfortune to be born poor ? Surely it is good to be one thing if one must, but all things if one can.

He was an only son. Only sons are proverbially—if there were such a proverb—born to vex the souls of their fathers and break the hearts of their mothers : unless indeed

they turn out milksops, and are smothered out of manhood by petting. Whatever truth there may be in that non-existent proverb, Walter Gordon was saved from being an awful example thus far by—being spoiled. Everybody had combined to spoil him ; and the universal sunshine that had been his lot in the world had made him the finest fair-weather sailor that ever was known. And, as fair weather was his destiny, to have made him anything else would be to have made him ill. What need is there of wasting the qualities of an Arctic explorer on the captain of a pleasure-boat ? Give him pleasant ways, and his career is fulfilled.

To a man of his temper, thorough-going bodily discomfort is a positive joy. It gives a piquant flavour to a life of ease. To stand in smoking clothes, hungry and thirsty, in the ungenial parlour of The Five Adzes, with no comrade but a pipe, was as welcome to Walter Gordon as to stand in his everyday shoes would have been to a real landscape-painter with his bread to earn—for a change. Poor of nature must he be to whom *vagrant freedom* is not one of the grandest of luxuries ;

the doubtful fare, the chance lodging, the power to stay or go on as caprice may order, the openness to adventure, the scorn of weather, the day without duties, and the night without dreams. What do steam-travellers know of the delightful temptation to stray out of the high-road in order not to lose the chance of being lost on a moor? Steam is good after all—it leaves the by-paths and the corners sacred to those who love them. There was a railway line within three miles of Laxton, but it left Laxton more out of the world than when the coach used to pass through it in days when the oldest inhabitant was a school-boy.

And now there is no need to follow the thoughts of Walter Gordon, for the very sufficient reason that he had no thoughts to follow. He had tramped a good five-and-thirty miles that day, and was half asleep on his legs as he stood with his back to the chimney, waiting for eggs and bacon, and lazily listening to the rush of the rain.

Such conditions of mind and body can have but one end. In fifteen minutes from his interruption of the song that formed the sole

recreation of Laxton, he was asleep in the chimney-corner, with his legs stretched out along the settle and his knapsack for a pillow. He had retired from the world, and did not even enter that of dreams.


But dreams will come.

How long he slept he knew not. But surely, when he thought he woke, he was dreaming still.

It is The Five Adzes, remember—in the most conventional of country villages the most conventional village inn. The rain still came down; the hailstones still beat against the window-panes. The long deal table still stretched along the sanded floor. Even as when he entered there was singing. But it was not The British Grenadiers, or any Laxton version of that famous march, and the singer was not the gamekeeper. In short, he could not believe his ears—or his eyes.

He had been in Italy—perhaps that was mixing with his dreams.

At any rate, what he saw was as inconsistent with an English village inn as The




British Grenadiers would have been with a village tavern in Calabria.

The room was filled with an atmosphere of awe-struck wonder. In the gamekeeper's chair sat the gamekeeper—transformed indeed. He had become a woman—and a woman who was less to be looked for in *The Five Adzes of Laxton*, than in any conceivable spot in the whole of the rest of the world.

Walter Gordon was used to wayside adventures, and was not given to dreaming when he tumbled across them. But he rubbed his eyes now. She was no roadside ballad-singer who might, on a wet night, have managed to tumble into the respectable society of the parish clerk, the sexton, and the under-gamekeeper. She was a full-made, handsome woman, of the most uncertain of all ages which may be called Midsummer, when Spring is forgotten, while Autumn as yet has made no sign. Though it was a midsummer storm that was falling, she was dressed in a travelling dress of furs that even a man's eye could tell at a glance must have



brought a small fortune to the tradesman who had had the making of it, and there was an air about it of having been paid for in francs rather than in pounds. Her complexion was of a marvellously brilliant fairness—so brilliant indeed as to surpass the ordinary work of nature, and to be out of harmony with a pair of large brown eyes framed by long black lashes and eyebrows of the opposite colour to her hair, which was of the brightest golden brown. There was a want of youth—of nothing else—in the outline of her face, but no sign as yet that youth had gone; and her beautiful brown eyes shone with light, almost with laughter, in the flicker of the tallow candles on the long deal board. Walter's eyes went instinctively to her hands—he always looked to a woman's hands next to her eyes. He did not see her hands, but he saw a pair of the most exquisite gloves that ever visited a connoisseur in his wildest dreams, though they were not of the smallest size. Her features—to which he turned after her gloves—were nearly as regular as a sculptor could ask for in his model, save that there was a symptom of over-depression about



the region of the nostrils, and that there was one shade too much decision about the curve of the chin.

She was not an Englishwoman ; and therefore her precise station, socially speaking, was hard to read. She might be a vagrant princess, or she might be otherwise ; but to take her for an Englishwoman was out of the question. No Englishwoman would have worn furs in July, or have been so brown or so fair at once, or have had that easy carriage of the shoulders that even her travelling-dress could not conceal. And, above all, no Englishwoman could have sung to the most select of audiences in the voice, and with the style, wherein she was astounding the parliament of Laxton.

I hold the true Englishwoman's voice to be the sweetest on earth, whether she speaks or whether she sings. But, for its very sweetness, it lacks intensity and power. It wants the great dramatic tone which distinguishes a flood from a river. The village gamekeeper, the village sexton, the parish clerk, were being bewildered, with open eyes, open ears, open mouths, by all the bravura of

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the richest and fullest soprano ever heard off the stage—never, it may be sworn, in the sanded parlour of a village inn.

Walter Gordon closed his eyes again, and dreamed he was at the opera. And surely—surely he had heard that voice before? Had he not heard that very song elsewhere?

He listened to the end with closed eyes, invisible in his chimney-corner. Then followed a laugh, almost—but not quite—as musical as the song.

‘Bravissima!’ he exclaimed. But she took no notice, even if she heard. And that told tales. A singer who was not extremely used to ‘Bravissima’ would not have failed to notice a word as little to be expected in The Five Adzes as her own self and her own song.

He waited to see what would happen next—for surely this was no everyday adventure, and was not to be spoiled before its time. And he thought: ‘Surely I have heard that very voice, but where? There are no two voices like that in the world.’

Again he regarded her, more intently this time, through his half-closed eyes. She was

handsome, beyond question. But—well, there was no disguising the matter; there was a want of nature as well as of youth even about her smile. It was as bright as diamonds; but not as sweet as roses. It suggested the stage, even there, where the audience was listening with its mouths and eyes rather than with its ears. And there was a touch of easy, contemptuous humour about it too, which robbed it of half its charm, as if she were singing to these bores to mock rather than to please. But there was nothing but polished sweetness in her voice as she said, with a slow, clear, southern accent:

‘Now, my friends, I will hear you. It is your turn.’

She did not, like the gamekeeper, bury her face in pewter. But she took up an immense black fan, and used it to keep the smoke of shag away from her throat and nostrils, smiling serenely and benignly the while.

Walter Gordon had by this time convinced himself that he was really awake, and was not confusing dreams of the opera with the realities of *The Five Adzes*. Shyness was never his foible, and a sudden impulse seized

him. He retreated into the farthest corner of the chimney, and began the Serenade from Don Juan.


The fan stopped. The lady, princess, prima donna, whoever she was, looked at the gamekeeper. It was not he. Then at the sexton, then at the clerk, then all round the table—in vain. Then she struck the table with her fan, and called : ‘ Prosper !’

If there was any doubt about her being a foreigner, there was none about his being one who came in from the passage. Frenchman was written all over him, from the curl of his hat-brim to the tips of his fingers. And if she only suggested the foot-lights, he advertised them.

‘ Prosper, go to the chimney,’ she said, still in English, ‘ and find for me the gentleman that sings so bad—so very bad indeed. And ask him to leave off, if you please.’

Her speech was rude and not witty ; but it made the Laxton people grin. She, with all her outlandish look, had somehow found a shorter road to their unsympathetic sympathies than Walter Gordon.

‘ She is one of them,’ he thought to him-



self; but, though he was a musician and an amateur, he was not offended, not even though he had intended to turn the tables of surprise, and had failed.

But he was not going to wait for Monsieur Prosper to fetch him. He came out from his corner and bowed. The lady put the edge of the fan to her lips and looked at him over it with the gravest of airs. He waited for her to speak, hat in hand.

He did not think himself embarrassed. He believed himself, by his silence and exaggeration of deference, to be throwing the weight of the situation upon her. But, as she probably thought the same, they stood and sat thus till the steady look of her large eyes, into which she had called the most intense gravity, brought up a tinge of colour into his face; he felt it, and everybody knows how a blush grows. There was no boldness about her look, only the perfection of calmness and ease.

Gradually, as she watched the colour mount in him, a smile woke up in her eyes, then a laugh, and then she rattled her fan together. He, also, could not help a smile;

partly in sympathy with hers, partly at his own new sensation of having wanted ease.

‘It was you, then, monsieur, who said, “Bravissima?”’ she said very sweetly.

‘Naturally, mademoiselle. I thought I was asleep; but I have a habit of saying “Bravissima” when I hear you.’

‘No! You have heard me?’

‘Who has not, mademoiselle?’

‘No?’

He felt she was regarding now not himself, but his weather-beaten hat, his soaked clothes, and the vagrant look that, as an artist on foot, he had exaggeratedly affected; and was pleased that he had no more look of having heard her than the gamekeeper.


‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I have heard you in Paris and in Vienna. Not in London yet; but now in Laxton, where I welcome you in the name of the people.’

‘Oh dear, it is terrible! You know me, then?’

‘If you permit me, mademoiselle.’

‘It is equal; but I will see. Who am I, then?’

‘What voice is like yours but your own? You are Mademoiselle Clari.’



## CHAPTER II.

### TRIFLE.

THE great prima donna, on hearing her own name mentioned, sent a far-reaching glance from end to end of the long table. She knew, no doubt from experience, the power of her name even in remote village inns ; there were brigands and robbers in the world who would have let her go for no ransom but a song. But her long glance came back to her disappointed. The representatives of the people of Laxton did not spring to their feet en masse, leap on the forms and the table, wave their hats and cheer. They sat and stared at her, and some buried their faces in the pewter—drinking doubtfully to their own healths, but certainly not in her honour. For



all the emotion they showed, they might just as well have never heard even the name of *Mademoiselle Clari*. And, after all, that was not impossible. Had she been *Lady Quorne*, that would have been a different thing.

Why should she, who had received the applause of millions and the homage of princes, look disappointed, even for a moment, because the announcement of her name had fallen flat on the cobblers and carpenters of a little out-of-the-way village like *Laxton*? And yet, with all her self-possession, so obvious was the momentary disappointment that *Walter Gordon* observed it—it is true his eyes were quick, but he was certainly not looking for it, and looks that are seen when not looked for must be very plain indeed; people mostly see what they expect to see. He even caught the least little motion of her shoulders—the faintest suggestion of a shrug—as she turned her eyes largely upon him once more, and said :

‘You see, *monsieur*, that I am not so known like you say.’

‘That is precisely what the sun said,

mademoiselle, when he once found himself among the moles.'

'The moles?'

'Yes—very honest little creatures, but not famous for seeing beyond their day's labour. But because they don't see him, it is not less true that the whole world knows the sun.'

'But all the same, the moles are of the world.'

'Then they are more than Laxton is, mademoiselle.'

'Laxton?'

She had a trick, he noticed, of repeating a word in the form of a question, drawing her brows a little closer together at the same time. He had often noticed that the most eloquent eyes go with slow minds.

'This is Laxton, mademoiselle.'

'Oh, the place? I never heard of him.'

'Then Laxton is like you, you see—not so well known as it believes. Only there is just all the difference between the mole not being known to the sun, and the sun not being known to the mole.'

Walter Gordon was still as bewildered, at least so far as any adventures can bewilder

the adventurous, at finding the famous prima donna in the parlour of The Five Adzes ; but he did not choose to show his wonder, and was enjoying the yet greater bewilderment of the good people, who must, he judged, be finding themselves so strangely at sea on their own floor. He knew that he was talking nonsense, and was inventing some new compliment wherewith to impress the signora, when the foreigner who had been sent to fetch him from the chimney again bustled into the room.

‘Mademoiselle,’ he burst out in French, ‘this is Despair !’

‘Despair ?’


‘The depth ! I have torn my hair—see—but it is no use ; none at all. It is a Gig, mademoiselle—and a Deluge !’

‘A gig—and a deluge ?’

‘Yes, mademoiselle — yes, a thousand times.’

‘What is it you call a gig, Prosper ?’

‘A gig ? It is Despair ! It is a thing where you would get wet to the skin. It is Death, mademoiselle. That is a gig—Death ; Despair.’



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‘Then what is to be done?’

‘Nothing—nothing but to wait; to wait in a place where there is nothing to eat, great Heaven, but bacon, and where it rains for ever.’

Walter Gordon observed the Frenchman more closely. He was a large, portly man, who should, by right of age as well as of temperament, have been calm and stolid, and whose tragedy was therefore not unmingled with comedy. He gesticulated little, but there was an intensity and force of passion about him that made one feel that in every future lexicon the word Gig must henceforth be substituted for Despair. Walter looked for a moment at Mademoiselle Clari to catch from her eyes any sympathy upon the point of humour; but they showed no trace of a smile. Either she was used to Monsieur Prosper, or else the situation was a genuine tragedy.

At last she said, very seriously, and after the fullest reflection:

‘I think I should like to drive in a gig, Prosper.’

‘Great Heaven! Are you quite mad mademoiselle?’

‘Would one get so very wet, Prosper?’

‘Oh no, mademoiselle. You would only be drowned.’

‘And suppose that I like to be drowned?’

‘Great Heaven!’

Meanwhile Walter Gordon caught a look of bewilderment on another face—the most utterly complete he had ever seen. The Five Adzes had a landlord, and he was in the doorway. He had responsibilities that prevented his taking refuge like his habitual guests in the passive comfort of a stare. All he could do was to scratch his ear.

Since Walter was a painter as well as observer, he could not have had a better study of three contrasted faces made to hand. There was tragic volubility in Monsieur Prosper’s, stolid bewilderment represented by the landlord’s, and in Mademoiselle Clari’s a calm and reflective self-will, no less exaggerated in its way. She looked as if, having a caprice for being drowned, nothing would move her. And, certainly, a drive in an open gig in such a downpour would not leave her far short of drowning.

‘When shall you learn,’ she asked quietly

of Prosper, 'to ask me what I choose to do? Suppose the gig pleases me—what then?'

Walter was at that moment making a sketch of the landlord's face on his mental thumbnail, and he caught his eye.

'Can I be of any use?' he asked, including the landlord and Mademoiselle Clari.

'Yes, sir, you might, if e'er a man could understand their lingo. As for I, I can't make head—no, nor tail. What for a man should go out of his seven wits at sight of a trap, beats me—less it's French ways, as it may be, I never saw such folk since I was born.'

'Please to have the gig to the door,' said Mademoiselle Clari calmly.

'I'm afraid Monsieur Prosper is right,' said Walter. 'Your voice must not be drowned, mademoiselle.'


'Ah—then the rest of me is of no matter. Very well. Monsieur,' she said suddenly to the under-gamekeeper, 'go you and bring the gig for me.'

The gracious sweetness of look and manner that she threw into her address, the sudden

turn from stony obstinacy to the most winning courtesy, were not lost on Walter Gordon, however it might be with the gamekeeper. Had he been a prince whom she wished to bring to her feet, she could do no more. It was the first time he had seen the exercise of intentional fascination—and to be wasted on a Laxton peasant for a trifle? He was growing interested ; she was becoming something of a riddle to him, independently of her presence at The Five Adzes.

All the world knew all about Mademoiselle Clari, and Walter Gordon shared in the common knowledge. It is true that while everybody knew everything about her, nobody knew precisely the same. And Walter Gordon's share in the common knowledge meant the knowledge of a good many stories, less consistent than perfectly authentic—that they all were.

There is generally something mysterious about the advent of a prima donna. There are many people who, in their hearts, believe that the race has no origin, but simply appears. The world used to be content with



what it had, and cared not to pierce the bellows to discover whence the wind blew. But we have changed all that. We care less about how a singer sings than whence she gets her diamonds ; and less even about that delicate subject than her birthplace and her pedigree. And the result of our enquiries is rather to confirm the view, that a prima donna comes from nowhere.

Clari, for instance, had an Italian name ; but, as all the world now knows, an Italian name seldom denotes an Italian. There were people who said she was in point of fact an American—a Miss Clare, from Brooklyn ; and this they had on the best authority. That she was French, was a common belief ; she was related to Monsieur Prosper, her half-master, half-teacher, half-courier, half-impresario, half-secretary, as niece, daughter, wife, or whatever other relation happened to be on the best authority for the time. And certainly she spoke French far more fluently than she spoke American. That she had never yet been in the United States was proof positive with some that she was, with others that she was not, a citizen of one of




them ; that she had constantly sung in France, was positive proof with some that she was not, with others that she was, a Frenchwoman. But the best belief, and among the minority of really well-informed people, was that she was born in Madrid, or Seville, or Barcelona, or ' one of those places ;' at any rate in Spain. Clari was an adaptation of her christian name — Clara. She certainly had features of the Spanish type, she affected the Spanish costume, and she might be able to talk Spanish as well as she talked French, Italian, or English, for anything that anybody knew to the contrary. A very little Spanish, as a rule, goes nearly as long a way as a very little Italian. She was undoubtedly a good linguist ; good enough to be a Russian, or a cosmopolitan. The only nationality, in short, which was never laid to her, was the German ; and if she was never called Hungarian, it was probably because it never occurs to people to think much of Hungary in such matters.

On the score of her race or native land she herself was as reticent as becomes a prima donna. A prima donna is perhaps

unique among women in never talking about her aunts or uncles, or saying, 'when I was a girl.' And she had that peculiar but unpatriotic habit, not uncommon among queens of song, of letting the audiences that like 'native talent' claim her for a compatriot, and those that like foreign artists count her as a foreigner. In France, she never protested that she was not a Frenchwoman; but in England, she never so much as hinted that she might be an Englishwoman—a British Miss Clare. Such a suspicion would have been mischief; and a paragraph to that effect maliciously inserted in some newspaper gossip was at once suppressed and contradicted.


But on the whole, and for all practical purposes, whether Miss Clare, or Mademoiselle Prosper, or Senorita Clara, she was an Italian singer—and might, therefore, just possibly have come from Italy after all.

Then—was she married? And if so, how often? And if not, ought she to be? It did not follow that, because the bills called her mademoiselle, she was not madame. The personnel of her calling is a mass and a maze of contradictions; all that seems, is not; all



that is not, seems. Singers' husbands are as obscurely mysterious a race as singers' fathers—more so, indeed, unless they are made prominent by special scandal. And, as yet, no scandal had ever brought to light any possible husband of Mademoiselle Clari.

On the contrary, whatever she was, whoever she was, she was one of those happy women, well-nigh miraculously happy for one on her pedestal, from whom scandal rolls off without harm or stain. It was strange; for she had not the air of an artistic puritan. Miss Hayward was not the only person who had been unpleasantly struck by the contrast between her deep brown eyes and her golden glory of hair. Then she was eccentric, beyond all question; and eccentricity, in most cases, is the certain path to an ill-name. There were all sorts of anecdotes current and afloat about her caprices, her restlessness, her avarice, her prodigality, her generosity, her vindictiveness, her charity; but about the propriety of her conduct, not one. The most ill-natured could only say of her that she was cold-natured, and was therefore not exposed to the ordinary temptations. And



in truth, with all her undeniable fascination, nobody had ever been able to make love to Mademoiselle Clari. Those who had tried, invariably found her, not only cold, but stupid—at least, they thought so. Nor had anybody ever found her particularly gifted with brains.


As to her age—but that nobody even pretended to know, beyond the certainty that she was not less than twenty, and the probability that she was not over forty.

Such was Mademoiselle Clari, as Walter Gordon knew of her. He had heard her sing, and, to say the truth, she had interested him singularly little. Many people raved of her; but he was not one of her admirers. For his taste, her popularity was a fatal flaw in her. He ‘schwärmed,’ as they used to say at Lindenheim in the old student days, for all whom the general voice condemned; in these days he would have thrown in his musical lot with the disciples of the future—until the future came; and then he would have been its enemy. He could no more profess admiration for a popular singer than for a popular composer; he had long ago

made up his mind that majorities are necessarily composed of fools. So it had been at Lindenheim, so it was now, and so it would be always and everywhere ; for the devotion to minorities comes of inborn instinct, and can never be conquered by reason. And so he had always been in the habit of turning up his nose at the name of Mademoiselle Clari.

But now, though he had seen her close, and did not admire her the more, and though he had exchanged a few stupidities with her in the way of conversation, and though her behaviour by no means attracted him, still he felt himself within that circle of personal fascination, magnetism, whatever the name of the thing may be, that is more than half the secret of song. He felt sure that she was neither amiable nor wise ; but he knew he should never think of her without interest again.

And at the same time, he had to himself been regarding her first as an adventure, and then as a comedy. Her frank disappointment at finding herself unknown in Laxton, the missing one little useless leaf from her laurel



crown, delighted a student of his fellow-creatures. The episode of the gig was beyond him ; but, meanwhile, it gave him an opportunity of watching the effect of her fascination on the gamekeeper. Was she trying experiments too ?

It was not likely that even an electric spark would fly fast at Laxton. But then speed is comparative.

The effect was as simple as possible. The under-gamekeeper rose, stepped over the form, put on his cap, and went out into the rain. Mademoiselle Clari, as it were, folded up her sweet graciousness again, and put it away for next time. She looked neither at Prosper nor at Walter, but fanned herself abstractedly. Prosper paced up and down the parlour in a fume ; but he did nothing to stop the gamekeeper. And, if the latter was really influenced by chivalry, interference would not have been wise, for he was a strapping fellow, and tall of his hands.

But Walter did not feel inclined to submit to airs, simply because he had in effect said no more than that it was a wet evening. So

he repeated his offence, purposely, by way of an experiment in his turn.

‘You will get very wet, mademoiselle, without shelter or cover.’

‘I do not like being always the same.’

‘But you will catch cold.’

‘Not if I am drowned.’

‘And will drive? There is only room for two. Have you far to go, mademoiselle?’


‘Far to go? Ah, here is the gig. Good-night, Prosper.’

‘Mademoiselle!’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the landlord, addressing Walter, ‘you’ve had my gig round, and welcome, but I don’t know you from my own mother, and if the two of you takes a horse and a gig, who’s to bring it home again? That’s what puzzles me. You may be going to drive to Lingo, for all I don’t know.’

‘Have you a man to drive? No?’

‘Oh, I can drive my own self, if it comes to that. I’ve had a wetting afore now, and I’ll have many a more I trust afore I die, else I shan’t live long. But my gig aren’t



made for three, and we're none of us such little uns.'

'You will drive your own self? Ah, but I want you to drive Prosper. I shall stay. It is too wet for a dog. Ah, Prosper, my friend, you will be wet indeed,' she said to him in French, with a tender regret. 'But then I have a throat, you see, and you have none.'

'Great Heaven, mademoiselle! No throat? No, but I have lungs, mademoiselle, and a skin. You say yourself it is not fit for a dog, mademoiselle.'

'Are you a dog, my friend? Go; one of us must get wet. Would you like it to be me?'

'Mademoiselle, you speak English. Bid them bring me some paper and some ink and a pen.'

'A pen?'

'Yes. I shall compose my epitaph, and make my will.'

'And what will you leave me?'

'I shall leave you—to regret, mademoiselle.'

'Ah?'

'And for my epitaph, that shall be——'



‘I will write your epitaph, Prosper. There—you see I save you all the trouble. Do you hear me, monsieur? When shall you learn to do what I say? Ah, how it rains!’

And certainly there must have been some strong reason for turning out Monsieur Prosper with what was beginning to look like wanton cruelty—some stronger reason still for his making unwilling preparation to obey. The rain was pouring down in floods and torrents, so that even the seasoned labourers of Laxton were delaying the need of going home.

Why had the gamekeeper gone at once for the gig? Why had not the landlord of The Five Adzes objected altogether to the proceeding, and refused to let out his horse and himself to a strange Frenchman for an unexplained journey, on a night when no sane man would wish to be out of doors, even for pay? Why did Prosper, with all a Frenchman’s horror of water-drops and his care for his own comfort, submit to what seemed no matter of absolute necessity?

Walter asked himself all these questions, and could find but one answer. It was ‘not

fascination, it was not magnetism ; it was just Mademoiselle Clari. He began to understand what made her such a queen of song. He was beginning to dislike her practically instead of only in theory ; and yet he hoped that she was not going to ask him also to do anything very absurd.

It took Monsieur Prosper a long time to prepare. Facing the rain seemed to require as much anxious arming as if he were going out to battle. At last, when he was complete, he must have struck the people of Laxton with awe, for he stood before them thrice his former size, in a huge Russian cloak of fur that covered his head and hat with a hood, fell over his finger-tips, and reached down to his heels. It was to be hoped that the gig from The Five Adzes was tolerably roomy, or it would be worse for the driver.

Presently the gig went splashing off. Clari kept her seat at the deal table, fanning herself, and drinking sugar and water. She did not seem in the least disposed to move, and her presence appeared to keep anybody else from moving. And yet Walter felt that all

remained there by her will, and that if she had willed them all to go, they would have gone.

What was her next caprice to be ?

‘This is new to me,’ she said presently to Walter, who was sitting just outside the chimney-corner. ‘What do you do when I am not here ? I want to see. What do you do ?’ she asked, turning suddenly to the game-keeper.

‘Well, miss, I don’t know as we do so much. We just sits a bit, and takes our beer——’

‘And sing, too,’ said Walter.

‘You sing ? Ah, that is what I want to hear. We will do what you always do. You shall have your beer, and you shall sing. I can drink out of pewter too. Ah ! this is good—and hark to the rain ! Sing—you !’ she said to the gamekeeper.

He looked round at his friends a little feebly, coloured, and smiled bashfully. Clari watched him gravely over the edge of her fan, which hid all her face below the eyes.

Walter felt a greater dislike to her than ever. Was she so bent on conquest that she

could not let a peasant alone, but must needs flirt with a servant if his master were not by ? As for Walter himself, she seemed to ignore him—whether that increased or lessened his growing dislike I know not. Nevertheless, he remained. She had not willed that he should go.

It must have been a bad moment for the gamekeeper. He found courage neither in his own heart, nor in the faces of his friends.

‘Very well,’ said Clari ; ‘I wanted to hear, that’s all.’

All—and enough.

‘Great Job, the god o’ thunder,  
And March, the god o’ war——’

But, when the end of the first of the interminable verses was reached, Clari rose and swept out of the room with a proud smile, half of which at least she gave to Walter. It seemed to say :


‘You see I can conquer little worlds as well as large !’

## CHAPTER III.

### A STORM IN A TEA-CUP.

THE next morning was sunshine after rain.


The young painter rose early, as became his profession. Indeed, it would have been worse than a sin and a shame—it would have been positive discomfort—to lie in the truckle-bed in a sort of nondescript attic of The Five Adzes, when the sun was staring broadly in at the window-panes, and bringing in with the light an atmosphere that was half of carnations, half of stable. It was not more than five o'clock when Walter Gordon threw himself from under the horse-cloth, or whatever it was that served for a blanket, and forced wide open the lattice window. It had assuredly never been opened since it was made.




And, as the window flew open, he received all over his head and shoulders a bright and fragrant shower-bath from the dripping vine-leaves.

What in all the earth is sweeter than such mornings, when the rain-drops, though they still half-drown the roses, are like tears of joy? The rain had played havoc enough with the flower-garden of The Five Adzes, and the vegetable-garden too, but cabbages and cabbage-roses alike were laughing at their own destruction. The house was not yet awake.

‘I wonder how that singing woman fared in The Five Adzes,’ thought Walter, as he took another glittering shower-bath, with his hat off, under a plum-tree. ‘I have a shadowy sort of a next-morning-feeling on me that she made fools of us all somehow last night—even the sexton. Fancy meeting Clari at a village public! I must get to the bottom of it all somehow; and I must improve the acquaintance. Not that it’s hard to know her. I’ve seen her sort budding in Lindenheim. Ilma would have made just such another, only—no; Ilma would never



have drunk beer out of a pewter. And to think I ever thought myself over head-and-ears in love with Ilma ! Well, we were a lot of young fools at Lindenheim, in the days when we were—old. I wonder where they all are now ? We haven't done so very much, for all the geniuses that we were.' He leant with his arms on a gate and watched a cow taking her breakfast ; and somehow there seemed a sort of sentimental sympathy about the cow. ' Yes ; it is true, madam,' he said to her. ' You and I are alone now, but we have not always been. There is something in the air to-day like Lindenheim. I suppose it's because I've never been up so early since I was there, or had such a recollection of having drunk so much beer. It's a fine morning, madam ; and I have no doubt the rain was good for something or other, except for Monsieur Prosper. I suppose you will be honoured this morning by providing, in conjunction with the pig and the hen, a breakfast for a prima donna. That will be something to tell your calves' calves, for a Laxton cow. I must draw your portrait, madam, and make a present of you



to The Five Adzes. I must get in my hand for Lady Quorne. For you must know, madam, that, simple—I may say shabby—as I stand here, I am on my way to a live countess's; think of that, madam. Such is art—last night, eggs and bacon; to-night, ortolans and chambertin; to-morrow night—who knows? I'm not sure I don't prefer the eggs and bacon. I wonder if art is privileged to shooting-jacket and slippers at my Lord Quorne's. I wish the house would stir. There's something terribly hungry about the smell of roses. And that grass of yours makes me feel like—like—Nebuchadnezzar.'

A man who talks so idly to a cow for the sake of company, is pretty sure to be heart-whole; and that being so, Walter Gordon was in the right mood to enjoy the luxury of that perfect morning. He presently vaulted over the gate, and increased his appetite by walking some half-dozen miles. And it was still early when he returned.

At the garden-gate he met the under-gamekeeper, carrying a monstrous cabbage-leaf—fresh and dewy, like all the rest of the morning—covered by another. The man



bore it with as much tenderness as if it had been a child.

‘Good-morning,’ said Walter, taking out his pen-knife, and carefully cutting off the finest rose he could find in the landlord’s garden.

The gamekeeper was in a dilemma ; instinct sent one of his hands towards his cap, but something rolling from between the cabbage-leaves, warned him that politeness must yield to the safety of his burden. It was a strawberry.

Walter smiled. There were no strawberry beds in the garden of The Five Adzes, and no doubt its habitué, the gamekeeper, knew that as well as he. Mademoiselle Clari was not to go without at least one simple luxury, after all.

‘You seem to have got a fine lot of strawberries there,’ said Walter, ‘to judge from the specimen—the one on the ground, I mean.’

‘They would have been, sir, if the rain hadn’t drowned ’em. But I thought the French lady might like a few—such as they be.’

‘Do you grow them yourself?’

‘Bless you! no, sir. I’ve been a matter of ten mile out and back to get these here.’

‘Indeed?’

‘They’d have been uncommon fine, to be sure, if it hadn’t been for the storm. Some out of my lord’s, be they.’

‘My lord’s? Lord who?’

‘Lord who, sir? No—why my Lord Quorne, to be sure.’

‘What—is Lord Quorne’s place so near? Why, I might have been there myself, by now. I thought it was a dozen miles away. So those strawberries are Lord Quorne’s?’

‘They’re out of my lord’s—leastway, out of my lord’s gardener’s. And he’s a main good sort. He’ll always do a good turn for me.’

‘One good turn deserves another, I suppose. I suppose you don’t walk ten miles out and in after strawberries every day?’

‘Well, no, sir. If it comes to that, I can’t say I do.’

‘I suppose you want to lay your trophy at her feet with your own hands. Is the lady up yet?’ he asked the girl who acted as cham-

ber-maid, boots, waiter, and even as ostler. She had looked a good-tempered girl enough overnight, but did not look in harmony with the laugh of the morning—more especially as her eyes fell upon the cabbage-leaves.

‘Oh, she’s up, sir. And so’s a bottle of ginger-pop with a gooseberry in.’

The gamekeeper was not too stolid not to see where the girl’s eyes fell; and he looked nearly as sheepish as when he had been called upon to sing.

‘Allow me,’ said Walter Gordon, with the gravest politeness, handing her the rose. ‘I have walked all the way to the nearest rose-bush to gather it for you. It’s out of my own garden—leastway, out of my own landlord’s garden, as my friend here would say.’

‘Oh, there’s lots of roses for them that wants ’em. P’rhaps the French lady ’d like a rose—if a lady she is. I don’t call her one.’

‘Why, what’s the matter? What has she been doing now?’

‘I don’t say but what she don’t like strawberries. There’s lots like that sort of rubbish, without being ladies. Oh, I never heard tell of a lady sitting drinking and smoking, with

a lot of men that ought to be at home with their wives—them that's got them. And them that hasn't are mostly fools.'

'I've no doubt my friend here will take the hint. I'm sure he couldn't do better.'

'Oh, I'm not meaning him. He may do what likes him, and 'twill like me.'

'You mean the sexton ?'

'The sexton !'

'Or me ?'

'Them the cap fits, let 'em wear it,' said the girl, making the most of her parting shot, and vanishing elsewhere.

'One night in a village—and already with all the hedgers and ditchers at her feet, and all the women by the ears I thought Walter Gordon. 'It is a real comedy. Come, my man; never mind a breeze. What's her name—Peggy——'

'Jenny, sir,' said the gamekeeper, with a hang-dog look on his honest face, and a sort of a sigh.

'Jenny—you will make it all right with a ribbon. Come and give mademoiselle your strawberries.'

‘P'r'aps, sir, you'd best take 'em in, if you wouldn't mind.'

‘No, no. That would never do. In the first place, I haven't walked ten miles for them. And in the second, you mustn't give way to Miss Jenny's whims. Come—I'll see that she only eats the strawberries; not you.'

Mademoiselle Clari's breakfast was laid in the only available room—that is to say, in the sanded parlour, still reeking with the fumes of stale shag and last night's beer. And it was plain enough that something besides jealousy was at the root of Jenny's ill-humour. Temper is catching.

It was a downright thunder-cloud, with signs of lightning, that hung over the face of the prima donna. She was fiercely sullen, and swept the sand about with tragic dignity. What had happened? Even Walter Gordon paused before he ventured on a 'Good-morning.'

‘Ah, so it is you!’ declaimed Mademoiselle Clari almost in recitative, or at any rate, in that rhythmic volume that marks southern anger—when, as now and then happens, it

does not scream. 'Perhaps you call this an auberge. It is a trap of brigands. Gran Dio! What place of horror is this—yes, of horror!'

'What is it? Is it anything I can help you?'

'P'r'aps the lady will accept of these here,' said the gamekeeper, plucking up courage by the roots, so to speak, and addressing the enraged prima donna at second hand through Walter Gordon. 'They'd have been finer but for the storm, but they're out of my——'

What evil genius could have driven him to speak just then?

'What have I to want with your strawberries, imbecile?' said the prima donna, with sublime scorn. 'Take them away. I asked for no strawberries. It is because I do not want them, therefore you bring them. I ask for coffee, it is my life, et voilà! They bring me soot, monsieur.'

Was this the same Clari who had last night won all hearts by her graciousness? Walter was not particularly amused, but he could not keep from a smile at the rueful

visage of his friend the gamekeeper, who had walked ten miles and offended his lady-love, and all in vain.

And yet, even in the midst of this storm in a coffee-cup, there was that about Clari which raised the elements of farce into the region of tragedy. A queen denouncing rebellion could have done no more; and in the effect it was impossible altogether to remember the cause. It was whim—caprice—but it was passion, intense and genuine. It made one speculate, a little uneasily, what the result would be if she had real cause for anger. Surely in that case there would be tragedy indeed.

Walter Gordon looked at the coffee-cup, which certainly did not look tempting.

‘It is not good,’ he said sympathetically. ‘But, you know, one must always follow the custom of the country, mademoiselle. I only wonder that in Laxton you should get coffee at all.’

‘I have lived to fall among savages! They have only one chaise—one gig—and Prosper takes it and leaves me here. I sleep on a bed—O gran Dio!—I ask for coffee, they

make me soot ; and they comfort me with strawberries !'

Clearly there was nothing to be done. Walter nodded a hint of withdrawal to the gamekeeper, and threw open the window, a real comfort that did not seem to have occurred, with all her delicacy, to Mademoiselle Clari. It was her way, he began to think, to care only for the impossible—until it was gained.

She still paced up and down the room, exclaiming at intervals both in French and Italian, altogether heedless of the sunshine, perfumed with roses and carnations, that streamed in. He rang for his own breakfast. It was brought in by Jenny, who bounced in, banged down everything at once on the table, and bounced out again without a word. Last night it had been storm without and sunshine within ; the atmospheric conditions were reversed to-day.


Still she marched backward and forward, with the train of her extravagant travelling costume sweeping and gathering all the sand, and worse, of the bar-parlour's next morning. Walter ate his eggs and bacon and drank his



ale with a fine appetite, unobtrusively observing Mademoiselle Clari the while. And, as he observed her, there somehow dawned upon him a memory. He had never, till last night, seen Mademoiselle Clari's eyes; and yet last night was not the first time that he had seen the eyes of Mademoiselle Clari.


Filled with fire as they were, they were yet more striking in their dark and yet luminous depth than ever; and they seemed connected in his mind—was it with Manchester? Paris? Oxford? Jena? Rome? Lindenheim? Surely, Lindenheim. And with Ilma? Lotte?

Ah! where, then, had Celia March been all this while? He had not forgotten her; but then where were all the rest, either—‘Where are the snows of yester-year?’ Lindenheim was not famous for the endurance of love or friendship. Yester-year's snows melt as surely elsewhere as at Lindenheim; but they do melt more quickly there. Still, Celia had been Celia. She had touched a little bit of his heart, and not merely his fancy, during that long walk to Waaren and home again. And they had been friends.



But he had never heard of her having made a career; he had not heard of her for years. It was strange, for, of all the Lindenheim students, he remembered her voice as having been the most promising, as well as the most beautiful. And now he remembered her eyes also. And he remembered also an old fancy of his, that, if they ever grew to be filled with passion, they would be strangely like—what he saw now.

Apart from her eyes and her tragic intensity of expression, anger, or sunlight, or both, did not improve the appearance of the prima donna. She certainly looked two full years older than the night before, and her complexion needed artificial light for its beauty. That, and the parlour, were the only things that did not share in the sparkling freshness of the sunshine after rain. That her personal toilette was not arranged very exquisitely was not to be expected under the circumstances. He himself had benefited more by his involuntary shower-baths than by any supply of water with which Jenny had supplied him; and he knew that foreign ladies do not require such large washing-basins as their English



sisters. But he would have thought that, beside all other discomforts, the loss of a cup of coffee might well have been borne.

While he looked, however, the storm cleared away—not gradually, but in one instant. A gracious smile broke out all over her face, and left not one trace of a cloud behind. Walter Gordon was actually startled by the transition.

‘You people of Laxton are so funny,’ she said, as she seated herself at the open window.

‘Well, mademoiselle, we have our oddities. Perhaps we are vain of them.’

‘The song last night was too adorable.’


‘We consider it a very fine song.’

‘But how strange! You are of Laxton, and you have heard me—and you say at Vienna?’

‘Is it so strange?’

‘And you do not speak like the others—not at all.’

‘I suppose we all have our little mysteries, mademoiselle. For example, you are at Laxton. That is stranger than my having been at Vienna.’



‘Not at all. I come from the railroad, I was to be met, and I find I have mistook the day. There is all the wonder. What is yours?’

‘Why I heard you at Vienna? Simply because I was there. You would not expect me to be there, and not hear you?’

‘What did you hear me sing?’

‘Lucrezia.’

‘Ah, that is a fine part for me! I can feel myself in tragedy. I am glad you heard me in Lucrezia. Only in Vienna it was always used to be spoiled. Do you like Waldmann?’

‘Well——’

‘You may tell the truth to me. I hate her. And she is a German. I hope you did not applaud Waldmann.’

‘Do you mean musical hatred or personal, mademoiselle?’

‘How? I only know one kind of hate, I. It is all one.’

‘I should not like you to hate me, mademoiselle. I think I should be afraid. You made me think very much about Lucrezia, just now.’

‘Ah, the coffee? Yes; it annoyed me. I do not like to be put out in my ways. But that was nothing. That hurt nobody.’

‘I’m afraid there was one, though, whom you hurt very much indeed. I doubt if he will recover it all his days.’

‘No?’

There was a little eagerness in her tone, as if she was pleased.

‘It was the singer of last night, you know. Poor fellow, he walked ten miles this morning only to get you some strawberries for your breakfast, and you would not look at them. And that hurt him. We keep feelings in Laxton, madame, though we don’t keep coffee.’

‘Ah—I cannot bear to hurt feelings; and of the poor—it is a shame. And he sang that song? And walked ten miles for me? Is it true?’

‘Quite true.’

‘Here is my purse, monsieur. You know money. Give him what you will.’

‘H’m. I think—somehow—that he would prefer your taking the strawberries.’

‘Oh, I will eat them all. I cannot bear to

hurt ; it hurts me. Call him in. He has not gone ?

There was no mistaking her eagerness to heal the wounded feelings of the gamekeeper. Walter Gordon went out to look for him, and found him, as he expected, not far from Jenny. He came in bashfully, but not quite so uneasily as before.

‘You have brought me strawberries,’ said the prima donna with eager graciousness. ‘I did not know—I was annoyed. May I have them ?’

The man coloured as red as fire.

‘The strawberries, miss ?’ he stammered.

‘Yes—I want them now.’

‘I’m—I’m uncommon sorry—miss, I am—but—I thought you didn’t care for them things, maybe—and so—well, I just gave ’em to Jenny. And so, you see, miss, she——’

‘Ate them,’ said Walter Gordon, ‘and gave you the rose I gave her ? I see. Well—such is constancy, mademoiselle. You see the proof of it in his buttonhole.’


The keeper looked down at his own coat ; and sure enough the rose was there.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CUCUMBERS, AND OTHER GOURDS.


I BEGIN to fear that the Earldom of Quorne is assuming uncomfortable dimensions, considering that hitherto it is but a shadow. It is time to see what lay inside.

Considered as a shadow, it was very large indeed—so large as well-nigh to overshadow a considerable portion of the entire county, of which the city of Deepweald is the capital. Such had been the case for many generations. The Mordants, Earls of Quorne, had, no student of the peerage need be told, come in with the Conqueror, and had contrived to stay where they had settled, through all the vicissitudes of the history of England. They had always been distinguished for a singular



absence of dangerous qualities; they were the most negative family in the whole of the United Kingdom. They had been famous neither in the armies nor in the councils of their sovereigns; nobody had ever feared them, and therefore nobody had ever injured them. Like their own peaches, they lived on the laziest and sunniest side of the wall.

Hinchford—Viscount Hinchford was the second title of the house—was the principal seat, and quite a show place in its way. It was of a not unfamiliar pattern. The house itself was built very large and very low, as if the architect had been careful to observe, literally as well as metaphorically, the tastes of a family famous for making itself comfortable on its own soil, and with a rooted objection to going upstairs. Palladin, I think, was the name of the style; at least the County Histories called it so, dwelling lovingly upon its fluted columns and the exact dimensions of its architraves. Along the many-windowed front ran a long terrace with a stone balustrade, with a broad flight of quasi-marble steps descending from the centre, and pots of shrubs along the coping,





after the fashion of Versailles, to which the same County Histories never failed to compare Hinchford. There was a home-park and a deer-park. The interior was arranged for comfort as well as for luxury ; and there were gardens and greenhouses that formed its crowning glory. There never were such peaches and nectarines as grew on those walls, nor such strawberries as grew on those beds, even when it rained—as Jenny of The Five Adzes had tested for at least once in her days. Every Earl of Quorne had his taste. It was invariably respectable, and ranged from connoisseurship in old port and its ensuing gout, to black-letter learning and its consequent—say wisdom. Horticulture was the ruling passion of the present, and eleventh, Earl of Quorne.

He was a dapper little man of middle age, who ruled one whole fifth part of the county, and served a gardener from the Lothians. There was a time of his youth when he had held the Queen's commission as a lieutenant in the Coldstreams ; but he had never obeyed his colonel with the docility he displayed towards plain Alexander Ferguson. He had

his reward. He invariably carried off the first prize for peaches at the county flower show ; and he lived on his gardener's glory for the rest of the year. What gold, not merely of sunshine, was melted in the crucible must remain untold. It is doubtful if Mr. Ferguson himself could tell ; that he never did tell is beyond contradiction.

Such was the Earl of Quorne ; and he was a happy earl. But once a year he was unhappy—from the beginning of May to the middle of July—and the worst of it was that this was just the most critical time of the whole year for the fruit garden. While he was away, who could tell what unseasonable frost might not deprive him of the first county prize ?

But it was destiny. As far as Mr. Ferguson was greater than the earl, so was the countess greater than even Mr. Ferguson.

Apart from their being earl and countess, a relationship which renders it unnecessary to account for any sort of marriage, there was every reason why these two should have come together. Though their hobbies pulled hard in diametrically opposite ways, the fact

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that each had one may be assumed sufficient to create a bond of sympathy, if not of union.

The Countess of Quorne was in truth a very great lady ; indeed, she was the daughter of a Marquis of Horchester. But, by a singular caprice—or what would be singular if it were not otherwise—Nature had given her the heart of a thoroughbred Bohemian. I do not mean there was anything wrong about her. Nobody ever breathed or dreamed such a thing of the Countess of Quorne. But her tastes were eminently unsuited to the cultivation of peaches. She looked up to the painters, poets, and musicians who looked up to her. She loved London at peach-blossom and strawberry time, not for the sake of the season, but for the sake of the artistic hangers-on of the season. She loved the atmosphere of the studio, and longed to be a man that she might go behind the scenes. As things were, she was obliged to bring behind-the-scenes into her own drawing-room.

Noblesse oblige ; and, after all, she was Countess of Quorne. She could not dispense with her title any more than with her diamonds. So she performed all needful social

duties with the utmost dignity and propriety. But during the day she was more often to be found in the workshops of national galleries and anti-national galleries, watching the painting of the pot here and of the kettle there, than at garden parties and such like Philistine doings. She liked sitting for her portrait. About twenty of her were hung at Hinchford ; and very seldom indeed an Academy Exhibition opened without at least one portrait of the Right Honourable the Countess of Quorne. She had a box at both opera houses, and envied the gods in the gallery.

Of course she herself could do a little of everything. She could paint—at least, she did paint—and that with like merit in every style. Landscape, portrait, genre, history, fancy, caricature, were all one to her. She could—at least she did—compose. There, indeed, her field was more limited ; she mostly set ballads of which she herself wrote the words—for she was a poet as well as painter and composer. She had published a volume of poems, of which the title matters not, under the nom de plume of *Aspasia*, that she might not be confounded among the com-

mon herd of royal and noble authors. Her choice of *nom de plume* did not say much for the classical scholarship of a lady at once so talented and so respectable, but, nevertheless, she was a classical scholar, and had travelled through half a Dialogue of Plato in the footsteps of Lady Jane Grey.

But, though catholic and cosmopolitan both in her tastes and in her accomplishments, she had her caprices and her favourites, like other people. She was terribly strict with regard to women. No *prima donna*, however distinguished, could hope, save by the passport of the most notorious decorum of manners, to gain a foothold in the house of Lady Quorne. With men it was different; and it was observed that, in her opinion, the better the face the better the painter, or the better the tenor, baritone, or bass, as the case might be. She had no children, and freely exercised her maternal instinct on promising, bright, and handsome young men, so long as they could make a blur with a brush, or stumble through a song, but always so long as they were not of the army of amateurs. For these—being a woman of natural sound sense—she had a

mortal aversion. Amateurs, even of opposite sexes, do not love amateurs ; and, in addition to all her other accomplishments, Lady Quorne could herself sing the songs she herself wrote to the music she herself composed.

Thus it was certainly not strange that she should have made the acquaintance, in some studio or other, of Walter Gordon, who did not call himself an amateur, and was obviously capable of painting her face to admiration, on the strength of having a good-looking face of his own.

All was arranged for her giving him a sitting for her thirty-third portrait at Quorne House in Park Lane, when a telegram came to the earl from no less a person than Alexander Ferguson at Hinchford. It ran as follows :

‘Largest cucumber on record. Mr. Plowman.’

What was to be done ? It was enough to make a saint—much less a mortal earl—swear. A man must have an ambition, after all ; and the Earl of Quorne’s was to raise a larger cucumber than Mr. Plowman of Mellington,

a not distant neighbour in the same county. The earl was facile princeps in wall-fruit; but to Mr. Plowman of Mellington he could not hold a candle in cucumbers. Nevertheless, where there is a will, there is a way. Mr. Ferguson had *carte blanche*—and used it thoroughly. To such purpose did he employ the margin, that this very year the earl's cucumber-frames contained at least three cucumbers bigger than the biggest at Mellington. It was a grand and proud moment for Lord Quorne when the news arrived in Park Lane. But the spirit of rivalry between the competitors seemed to have infected the gourds themselves. There was one unnoticed, unsuspected cucumber at Mellington—a very dark horse, to use a somewhat violent metaphor—that one sunny day felt called upon to assert the honour of the Plowmans. Unsuspected it grew and grew, till it first distanced its neighbours and its rival.

What was to be done indeed? Here it was, in mid-season, with my lady's painters, poets, and fiddlers in full career, and meanwhile, the battle of the gourds would be lost *for want of a general!*

There are people who, when they hear of an earthquake, say, at any rate with their hearts, 'Ah, it would never have happened if only I'd been there.' Such people have an immense faith in the virtue of the master's eye—and it may be, where the servant is the real master, not entirely without reason. *Quis custodiet custodes?*—Mr. Alexander Ferguson might watch nature very well, but who was to watch Mr. Alexander Ferguson?

Now, when two hobbies come in collision, it is clear that one of the two must give way. The countess did not choose, any more than the earl, that she should be left to do all the honours of the season by herself in the house in Park Lane, and he did not choose to go into the country and watch a cucumber-frame alone. And when these collisions happened, it was invariably the earl who had his way. The narrower the idea, the more certain it is to win. So, in mid-season, the entire household, bag and baggage, left Park Lane, the studios, and the theatres, to enjoy the country in its season, which perversely enough persists in refusing to postpone itself till after

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the session. Parliament did not miss Lord Quorne ; and indeed, in endeavouring to grow the largest cucumber on record, he was doing quite as much service to his country as many of his peers whom he left behind him.


But there is one advantage about being a countess — even though she be eccentric enough to leave town at its fullest, she need never be at a loss for material wherewith to set up a season of her own. For awhile, Hinchford became an offshoot of London. And, when the London season was over, it continued at Hinchford.

For instance, there was no earthly reason why the thirty-third portrait of the Countess of Quorne should not be painted just as well at Hinchford as within the atmosphere of the Royal Academy. Better, indeed ; for the countess would be made independent of appointments, which as a lady she kept, but as a Bohemian abhorred, by having the painter at her elbow. I will not go so far as to say that Walter Gordon was displeased at receiving an invitation to Hinchford. I will not even say that he did not give himself an extra air or two on the strength of it, among

his friends. He did not remember having sneered a little, a year ago, at Lady Quorne's choice of her portrait-painter last year. On the contrary, he took his piece of good fortune honestly, and without mock modesty—as, on the whole, a man should do.

That was how he came to spend a night in Laxton; for he always preferred his feet to any other sort of conveyance, whenever he had time.

There was one advantage about Hinchford. The character of its mistress made it possible for a man to arrive at its doors in any way he pleased. And, once within its doors, the guests altogether did very much as they pleased. It was not Bohemia, but it was as near an approach to that country, so beloved by those who know it not, as can be contrived by any one who can afford to spend all at once more than half-a-crown. Very few really great people were ever found there. Lady Quorne, with the zeal of an amateur Bohemian, which is to the real, simple thing as wine is to milk-and-water, preferred strange to home waters. Thoroughbred Bohemians thought her a little crazy; and would very much have preferred the great people as



well as the flesh-pots of Philistia—which she freely gave them.

The many descriptive accounts, locally published, of Hinchford and its neighbourhood called the latter ‘pastoral.’ Walter Gordon found it dull, and no doubt it was dull, and was not pastoral. Deepweald lay on the right side of the line of low hills, and Hinchford on the wrong, for beauty. But it was a pleasant walk, though rather heavy for the feet after the rain—just heavy and just long enough to raise a quest of strawberries into the regions of chivalry, and no more.

Of course, as it was an unknown country to Walter Gordon, there was an exceptional profusion and confusion of cross roads, each with its signpost, which, however, as a matter of course, invariably refused to point the way to Hinchford, giving ample and superfluous guidance to every place in the county, from Deepweald downwards, where Walter Gordon did not want to go.

‘To Deepweald, to Laxton, to Wilkley, to Grandon . . . . Sir, will you be so good as to tell me—— Holloa! Why, Gaveston?’

He had been addressing a parson, in the

most orthodox of clerical costumes and white collars, and with a long pair of whiskers.

‘Gaveston! Who would ever have thought of meeting you here?’

‘Why, Gordon?’

‘Ah, then you are Gaveston! After all, when I come to think of it, there’s no reason why two people shouldn’t meet anywhere. Last night I had a much more unexpected meeting. But I didn’t know you were going into the Church, old fellow. I always thought fast bowling more in your line. Are you fixed in this country? I must come and look you up before I leave, and have a talk over old times.’

The two young men were of about the same age, but were made to be contrasted in other respects than in the matter of costume. But there is no need to dwell on that point; we remember Reginald Gaveston, and we know Walter Gordon. A long series of Dorcas meetings had increased the air of wisdom suggested by every hair in the whiskers of the ex-cricketer; while every trace of Oxford had been rubbed away from the more cosmopolitan Walter.

‘I live at Deepweald ; I’m curate of St. Anselm’s there,’ said Gaveston. ‘I suppose you’re at the bar?’

‘No ; your chances of getting a chancellor’s living are gone, if you were counting on my being on the woolsack. By Jove ! I’ve been so many things since Oxford that I wonder you know me. I hardly know myself at times. Well, extremes do meet. You’re here because you’re a parson, and I because I’m a travelling painter. Do you know, I should like to hear you preach a sermon, Gaveston?’

The curate coloured, but whether from pleasure at a possible compliment, or from an uncomfortable sense that Walter’s desire might be connected with certain oats sown at Oxford a little inconsistent with sermonising, is hard to say.

‘I mean it,’ said Walter. ‘You would preach a splendid sermon if you haven’t forgotten how you used to bowl. I shall come to Deepweald on Sunday. Which way are you going now?’

‘I am for the present at Hinchford, Lord Quorne’s place, you know. But we shall be

extremely glad to see you if you are passing by Deepweald.'

'Why, then you are the very man for me ! But we ? What tale does that tell ?'

'I'm married, you know,' said Mr. Gaveston—not, Walter thought, with quite so much satisfaction as he had spoken of his visit to Lord Quorne.

'Married ? Well, there's more change in you than there is in me, after all. It's quite clear I must come to Deepweald. I must know Mrs. Gaveston. You've got on farther in life than I have. So you're going to Hinchford, too ? But, excuse me, Gaveston—I didn't know you had any of Lady Quorne's Open Sesames. I'm to paint her portrait—what are you to do ?'

'I am to dine and sleep,' said the curate of St. Anselm's.

It must not be supposed that Walter Gordon and Reginald Gaveston had ever been special friends, even at Oxford. Nor was it likely that the curate, now grooved down into Deepweald and caught and tamed, was exactly overjoyed at meeting with so thorough-paced a Bohemian as his old ac-

quaintance seemed to boast of being. The pleasure of meeting was all on Walter's side, who was always glad to meet an old face—next to meeting a new. And no doubt marriage may change a man. He might have been very glad to meet Walter anywhere but in his own country, where he would not be expected to give him a bed and ask him to dinner.

However, in one respect Walter Gordon was decidedly thick-skinned—or rather honest experience had gone far to prove to his own satisfaction that his company could not be less agreeable to others than to himself. And that, at any rate, is one great secret of the art of pleasing. And another was, that he never found anybody dull. He could always listen enough for one, and talk enough for two. During the walk from the signpost to the lodge-gate of Hinchford, he had talk for at least one and three quarters. Reginald Gaveston was a very brilliant man in Deepweald, but he did not come up to his reputation on the road to Hinchford.

And yet—and yet—how is that to be said of Walter Gordon of which he was utterly

unaware, and could scarcely be said even unconsciously to feel? He was the same, while trying to talk nonsense very hard to his old college acquaintance, as he had always been; and yet that evening and morning at The Five Adzes had practically cut his life in two. His adventure, even in these few hours since, had well-nigh passed out of his mind, except as an amusing anecdote which, with a few humorous touches of his own, might serve to make up a story to tell hereafter, including the idyll of the strawberries. Nothing had happened but trifles. But he knew, if without reflection or even conscious feeling one can be said to know, that an influence was upon him. It might be accompanied by dislike, by contempt even. Childish caprice, selfish ill humour, insatiable hunger for the admiration even of boors, and a hundred similar things, had all been displayed openly before him, and all the more glaringly by reason of the barrenness and poverty of the background. The ill humours he had seen would have lost their point in a loftier atmosphere; in an appropriate air, they would have been invisible. He had seen a woman



turning trifles into tragedies to suit her humour; she might have turned tragedies into comedies; it was the intense nature of the woman that he had seen, so intense as to need no conditions or circumstances for its display. And there had been no barrier between herself and her influence. Nothing had distracted his whole attention from her; she and her moods, her eyes, and her voice, had filled up the whole of life for a while. There had been a sort of fascination, even in the constant suspense as to what she would next do or say. And he who has once been under the spell of an intense will, however idly exercised, can never be quite the same as before—there is something new in him. The world contains a new human life for him. In a word, he might dislike, or even despise; but the world with Clari in it could never be the same as the world without Clari. He might never see her again; he might, and no doubt would, forget her, save as a piece of comedy; but she would always be there. Perhaps, it is wrong after all to say of such natures that they fascinate. They electrify.

But did all this come wholly from her, or

did it need something in him to work upon ?  
Would the same magnetic force have struck  
through the shell of the Reverend Reginald  
Gaveston, or turned Lord Quorne from watch-  
ing his favourite cucumber through his own  
private spectacles and saying, ‘ It grows ?’

Reverend Reginald Gaveston was a prig, and that he had a prig at his mercy. The temptation was too strong. The curate looked so intensely respectable, so painfully spotless, so elegantly whiskered, that to disarrange him, if only to the point of one whisker tip, was the first duty of artistic and unclerical man. It is to be feared Walter Gordon had not yet learned reverence for what is reverend.

‘Gaveston,’ he said gravely, ‘do you know Lady Quorne well, very well?’

‘She is my first cousin—that is to say, once removed.’

‘Indeed? That is fortunate. Much more fortunate than I. You see what I am, Gaveston—three-quarters tramp, one-quarter painter. In fact, I’m a special type of the rolling-stone. But rolling-stones have luck now and then. You shall introduce me to Lady Quorne.’

‘Why, I thought you knew her?’

‘Ah—in London; that’s one thing. But here! Of course you don’t know how a man feels, without a spare shilling in his pocket, when he finds himself on the threshold of the

county families. In short, I'm an adventurer, and I feel like one. I shall enter Hinchford under your wing ; you can say you knew me at Oxford, you know, and that—well, I had plenty of money to throw away.'

The jest was both a good and a bad one. It was good from the point of view of the jester with the spice of malice in him, who is still schoolboy enough to be unable to see a very clean white choker without a desire to dip a quill pen into an ink-bottle, bend it backward, and let it fly ; and also from the no less malicious but more philosophical standpoint of those who like to try little experiments on human nature—more especially on that part of human nature connected with corns. Nor is it altogether a bad thing to carry a little wholesome taste for mischief into years that, as a rule, have only too little of the schoolboy.

Walter Gordon felt instinctively that Reginald Gaveston had been born with an objection to introduce, as an old friend, a penniless painter-adventurer to a Countess of Quorne ; and the feeling was one that acts upon an amateur Bohemian like the pro-

verbial red rag on the proverbial bull. The true Bohemian, truly without a penny, would have sympathised with the curate rather than otherwise. But this, of course, the curate could not know. As for the badness of the jest—but that is obvious, and needs no explanation.

The curate did look a little thoughtful. No man, however good-natured, likes to pick up by chance an old acquaintance, to whom he may some day be called upon to lend half-a-crown. And that this was the habit of painters and poets he was well assured.

‘But—you are invited to Hinchford?’

The question showed so plainly what was passing in the curate’s mind, and such a vista of suspicion based on a felt hat and dusty boots, that Walter Gordon’s malice was disarmed.

‘Gaveston,’ he said, ‘confess at once you think me an impostor—a rogue and a vagabond; that I have never been asked to Hinchford; that I only want to be; that I want you to introduce me to your cousin, the countess, as a painter—out at elbows, it is true—but worth picking up, and being


patronised into genius. Never mind, old fellow—I won't trouble you. Only tell me the secret of walking in mud and dust, without a speck to show it—a man who knows that, has nothing more to learn.'

'It is quite simple,' said the curate simply. 'I came as far as the cross-road in a fly.'

Walter Gordon did look at Gaveston with some surprise. A man who has become saturated with the atmosphere of irony and badinage, when he comes in collision with a man who knows nothing of it, is the more bewildered of the two. He had not succeeded in mystifying the curate in the least, for the latter had taken all he heard as much at the foot of the letter as if it had come from some plain-speaking citizen of Deepweald, where nobody ever thought of saying one thing in order the more clearly and pointedly to express another. But Walter Gordon spent a whole second, at least, in trying to find what metaphor, or allegory, or twist of humour the curate intended, when he capped Walter's application of clean boots to worldly knowledge by importing the idea of a fly. It was almost more than a second before he realised

that the curate had really supposed that he wanted to know.

One second only. But what may not depend on a single second—on a single tick of the watch even, which is less ; or a single beat of the pulse, which is less still ; or a single wave of thought, which is the least conceivable measure, unless, indeed, it be the wave of a dream ? The longer I live, the more prone I am to see how life demands microscopic observation before it can be comprehended in large ; how it is not a great whole, divided and subdivided into infinite detail, but a mass of infinitely minute atoms, massed, in one way or another, into a more or less imperfect whole. I wonder that anyone is found bold enough to be a biographer. How can mortal man perceive, far less appreciate, the unfelt pin-prick here, the unperceived speck of dust there, that are of more lasting consequence and result than all the dramatic thunder and lightning that only serves to sweep away the lumber of accumulated pricks and specks, and to clear the air ? Meanwhile the curate of St. Anselm's had told Walter Gordon that he had come from



Deepweald as far as the cross-road in a fly, and Walter Gordon, being unused to dull sincerity, even in trifles, had paused a moment to find the irony in a simple observation, where the want of it had baffled him. And the moment was enough to postpone his repentance for a clumsy attempt to mystify one who was so over-easily mystified, and to bring them across Mr. Ferguson, the Scotch gardener; and then the curate said:

‘Will you excuse me, Gordon? I have something to say to Mr. Ferguson about—about——’

‘It will be the cucumbers, nae doot, Mr. Gaveston?’

‘Ah—thank you—yes; of course, about the cucumbers,’ said the curate, leaping with infinite gratitude at any word that might save him from entering the house of his cousin, the countess, as Walter Gordon’s godfather. ‘We shall meet again.’

And he went off with Mr. Ferguson, proud of the tact that had enabled him to put off, for at least a day, the request for the loan of five shillings, perhaps ten, that he saw ominously looming before him.



Reginald Gaveston duly followed Mr. Ferguson to the cucumber-frames. They were the question of the day, as regarded from my lord's side of the house, though, from the other side, in my lady's interest, they were not held in equal estimation. Lady Quorne was conscious of keeping too many hobbies in her own stable to find fault with those which, by being stabled in another's, were a standing excuse for her own ; but the same mutual tolerance for horticulture on the one side, and for æsthetics on the other, did not find its way downstairs. Mr. Ferguson felt a real and professional zeal for the cause, and affected more ; and, being a philosopher by nation, and a lecturer by nature, he gave Mr. Gaveston a lecture on the natural history of cucumbers in general that would have lasted, presumably, till the dinner-bell, had it not travelled off into a spoken treatise on his own skill in particular, and thence to the history of Jonah and theology in general—for Mr. Ferguson had been bred for the kirk, and never lost an opportunity of letting all men know that nothing short of the rankest *heterodoxy* had made him condescend to take

double wages as a gardener. To discuss abstruse points of metaphysical divinity with an English clergyman was a chance that did not come about every day. And whether he held forth on cucumbers, or on freedom of will, the silence of Gaveston was so impressive, and suggested such unfathomable learning, that the Scot, though nearly as shrewd as he was vain, felt that for once he had found a foeman worthy of his steel.

He did not bow, but held out his hand at parting; for Lord Quorne's head-gardener was fully the equal of the curate of St. Anselm's.

'I thank ye for a most interesting conversation, Mr. Gaveston. Ye're the most enlightened minister I ever met with. Ye've assented and consented to eighteen separate rank heresies, as they call them, in a single hour. John Knox would have burned ye where ye stand; but my lord shall give ye his best living, or my name's not Ferguson. And I'll give ye hints for sermons that'll frighten the bishops out o' their wigs, and last ye twenty year to come.'

Gaveston was getting a little nervous about

his visit to Hinchford. He had been especially anxious to make a good impression, and not to be claimed on the threshold as an old college friend by a penniless Bohemian, or a fellow-heretic by a disputatious Scotch gardener. It was not for this he had laid out that piece of simple cunning which consisted in leaving his hired fly at the cross-road, and walking up to the house, as any gentleman might, even if he kept a dozen carriages. To walk is a matter of taste; a hired fly, with a driver who might chatter to a groom, would have been a matter of imprudence, and have proved necessity. For, since the truth must be told, the Reverend Reginald Gaveston had not made the most of the advantages to which he had been born, or even of those to which his fame as a fast bowler had entitled him. He was, it is true, first cousin, once removed, to the present Lady Quorne, and he had known her when he was a boy; and what might not have happened when, he being curate of St. Anselm's, she came to live at Hinchford as the greatest lady all round Deepweald? If he had only known that his own cousin was

only going to become Countess of Quorne ! But then I cannot tell ; Love has a way of laughing at prudence, even where the most unlikely people are concerned, and I have never heard that curates are especially exempt from his laughter. Only two years before the present Lady Quorne came to the throne, he had married. That was not much in itself. But a long course of life in lodgings, of Dorcas meetings, and of a dozen and a half standing comparisons to her advantage, had led him on, by those slow steps which the heart knows so well how to make along the paths of association and opportunity, first into love, and then into marriage, with the only daughter of a land-agent in Deepweald—a most respectable man, but the reverse of such a connection as a countess would care to have at her own doors, and a Bohemian countess least of all.

Had Bessy Swann, good and nice-looking girl as she was, without a single h too many or too few, and with hands as fit to look well in gloves as anybody's in the county, been an actress or a singer, matters might not have been so difficult to manage. There would

have been a dramatic courage about such a marriage that would, or might, have gone straight to Lady Quorne's fancy. And if the girl had had no relations or friends, or had come from anywhere but Deepweald, things might not have been insuperable. For almost any girl will pass, so long as she is an orphan, with neither aunts nor uncles, and has no settled home. But for the Swanns of Deepweald to claim cousinship with the Earl of Quorne was an intolerable nuisance.


And so, to simplify matters and put them on their proper footing, it was obviously the right policy to ignore, with the utmost politeness possible, the Reverend Reginald Gaveston. It was not hard, for the present Lady Quorne, unlike her predecessor, was very seldom indeed at Hinchford. When she did come, as now, at a time of year when her guests were fewest, she, with a want of good breeding of which I cannot affect to pretend the greatest and best-hearted of ladies are not on occasions as fully capable as others, invited the husband without the wife, and that without excuse or apology, to dine and sleep at Hinchford.

When Bessy Swann became Mrs. Reginald Gaveston, it must be said, to do her justice, that the exceptionally aristocratic flavour that hung about the curate of St. Anselm's had far less to do with her part in the making of the marriage than might have been expected. His connection with the Marquess of Horchester was, as it were, a painting of the lily. He had so many advantages of his own. He was a clergyman, to begin with. He was a remarkably handsome clergyman, from the Deepweald standpoint. He was clever, learned, and so forth by right of profession. He read beautifully. He had some present means and fair expectations—so far as they would bear the deduction of certain old Oxford debts, of which nobody knew anything but certain Oxford tradesmen. And last, but not least, to win the curate of St. Anselm's was notoriously and openly the blue ribbon of Deepweald. There is no need to speak of such trifling matters as docility and amiability, because they are not, at least popularly, supposed to be particularly meritorious in the eyes of women; but still meekness in a curate is more endurable than in a dragoon.

But, not long after the engagement and shortly before the marriage—for Mr. Swann made the period of waiting short enough to be quite endurable—Miss Swann began to hear herself congratulated upon marrying into the ‘aristocracy,’ as people with titles are called in Deepweald. As Miss Hayward, who knew her peerage well, was the first to set these congratulations going, a taint of jealousy might have been suspected in less innocent circles than those of a cathedral city ; but Miss Swann, and Mrs. Swann still more, took them with absolute good faith, and even began to wonder—first in hidden corners of their hearts, then by mutual understandings, and at last with scarcely shamefaced openness—whether the Marquess or the Marchioness would really take proper notice of Reginald Gaveston’s bride. After all, land-agency is a profession and not a trade ; and a clergyman’s wife is a clergyman’s wife, as much as a captain is a captain. But no present, not so much as a brooch even, arrived from the great relations, and though wedding-cards were sent, none were returned. It was a mortification, espe-

cially as Miss Hayward never failed to ask, whenever she made a morning call at the curate's little house behind the college-green, whether her dear Bessy had heard from the Marchioness lately, and what she was wearing now. But it became even worse when Reginald's own cousin became Countess of Quorne in her mature years, and came to live, or might if she pleased have come to live, at Hinchford, only fifteen miles away.

Then was poor Bessy, without feeling the least guilty of evasion or equivocation, driven to shift after shift to escape from the open confession that she had no superiority over Deepweald, in ever having seen the new Countess of Quorne; that she knew more about Eve's dress than hers; that she did not know even whether she was handsome or plain, save from the photograph that found its way into a shop-window in College Court, and which every passer-by might see. Even Reginald could not tell her; he had not seen his cousin since he was a little boy. Nor could he explain to his wife why he was left so utterly without notice, though he knew very well. He could not say: 'I should





have had the run of Hinchford, and welcome, if I had married almost anybody but you.' And she could not say: 'Why do your great relations never notice you?' They had not been married long enough yet to have lost all sense of courtesy in their confidences.

Nevertheless, the sore rankled, as such sores will, far more than real wounds. And when, at last, a letter came directed, in an affectedly dashing hand, to 'The Reverend Reginald Gaveston, Deepweald,' with a real coronet and the letter Q to represent the seal, the really innocent heart of Bessy Gaveston gave a little leap; and it came to her—like what some people call a presentiment, and others, an unreasonable wish—that her first-born, her new and as yet provisionally-named Bessy, was to have a real countess for a god-mother after all. That would redeem everything. It was an invitation to Hinchford. But it was for Reginald alone, and not for her.

'I shall not go,' said Reginald, mildly but decisively.

'Not go, dear—not to Hinchford?' she had felt the neglect, but was unable to dis-

tinguish between the invitation of a countess and a royal command.

‘No, certainly not. They don’t even mention your name.’

‘Perhaps they don’t know you’re married, dear?’

‘Oh yes! They know.’

Bessy began to suspect what he meant. But she was still torn by conflicting desires. Pride is a feminine as well as a masculine thing; but even in men there are few things to which pride will not yield most humbly—especially the curious quality that is called proper pride, and has been dubbed a virtue, Heaven knows why. There was nothing in being asked to Hinchford to counterbalance the curate’s pride, but there was a great deal to compensate for the wound suffered by her own.

‘Do you know—dear—if you don’t mind—I think I should like you to go to Hinchford?’

‘It is impossible, Bessy. They have treated me——’

‘I know, dear. But—perhaps you don’t know how it feels when Miss Hayward asks

you how the countess dresses, and you have to say you don't know.'

No doubt Mr. Gaveston was a little hen-pecked. So are all men who are worth anything. And at last, and not slowly, he was brought to acknowledge that for the little Bessy's sake, and perhaps for others yet to come, he ought not to run the risk of offending the Countess of Quorne; not to speak of the virtue of forgiving injuries that, after all, might be unintentional. All these things Mrs. Gaveston impressed upon him; but 'Mind and don't forget to remember to notice how she's dressed' were her very last words.

He went; and before night, all the ladies of Deepweald knew that Gaveston had at last gone to Hinchford; but that Mrs. Gaveston had not, on account of some croup-like symptoms on the part of little Bessy. Bessy the elder was not at all untruthful; the child had croup-like symptoms, and she had not gone.

Reginald Gaveston had not told Walter Gordon that it was his first visit to his cousin since her countess-ship. But it is clear why

he should choose not to make it as social godfather to Walter Gordon, and should prefer the by-way of the cucumber-frames.

He reached the house without coming in collision again with his old college friend, and was told that Lady Quorne would see him in the white drawing-room. He had been in the house in former days and knew his way; but he wondered more and more, as he found it, if it could be true that a man like Walter Gordon by any sort of odd chance had found it also. He must have been an impostor—felt hats and knapsacks and their accompaniments had never found their way into Hinchford since the Mordants had been its Viscounts and Earls of Quorne. And then he thought how long it had been since he had seen his cousin Alicia, and if she had changed as much as he knew he must be since he was fifteen and she twenty-five, and he had spent a whole summer holiday at the seat of the marquess, and had thought her a vision of beauty. And then he entered the white drawing-room.

It was a large and noble room on the first floor, made for light and air, with large

French windows, and hung with pictures, mostly landscapes in bright colours, with plenty of blue and green. But there was no white about it in particular, except in the person of a lady, full of figure, sombre in complexion and dress, but decorated with a most glorious parure of pearls. She reclined half lazily on a low sofa, fanning herself slowly and luxuriously. Unmindful of his promise to Bessy at home, he looked at his cousin first and at her dress afterwards; she was not the vision of beauty he remembered, as fifteen remembers five-and-twenty, but she was well preserved, and had handsome eyes. And then came a difficulty. Should he greet her as Cousin Alicia? Would she call him Cousin Reginald? Or were they to be Mr. Gaveston and Lady Quorne?

Cousin Alicia herself solved the difficulty by rising graciously as far as a sitting posture, but no farther, closing her fan for an instant with as much expression of nothing in particular as if she had been a born Spaniard, and saying, as she fell back again in a less unconscious and therefore less graceful disposition of herself:

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‘Good-evening, monsieur.’

Bessy would have thought anything natural in high society ; Gaveston, though he knew by rumours that Cousin Alicia was as full of foreign affectation as an egg of meat, thought her way of solving the difficulty ingenious, but queer.

## CHAPTER VI.

### COUSIN ALICIA.

WAS the curate to call his cousin 'Madame?

It was a difficult question, for he felt he did not remember her since the old days—not the least in the world. He knew she was a remarkable, even eccentric, woman ; and that she had been a great deal abroad, which, no doubt, accounted for certain foreign, or, at least, un-English, ways that she had about her. She even, he noticed, affected a foreign accent, and he thought it became her. Altogether, he thought he should have a great deal to tell Bessy when he got home.

But, meanwhile, what was he to say ? He really wished to make an excellent impression, now that his pride was once swallowed. To

be called Alicia, after the Countess of Quorne, would be no disadvantage to the little temporary Bessy in after years, and even the curate of St. Anselm's, though he had given up fast bowling, was still a man.

There were several ways open to him by which he might begin a conversation ; and he reviewed them all. He might say : ' It is a long time since we met ; ' but then that would imply a rebuke concerning the cause. On the whole, he had better wait for his cousin to suggest Bessy, if she pleased. Or, he might tell her that she was looking very well ; but then, why shouldn't she ? On the whole, and after due reflection, he felt it safest to fall back upon the easiest and most neutral of all topics. ' Why should travelled Englishmen sneer at one another for always beginning with the weather ? We ought to be grateful that we have a weather, if only as the safest, most elastic, most universally applicable means of opening a conversation in the world.

' It is a very fine day—after the storm,' said Gaveston. ' But,' he added, on mature reflection, as if he had gone too far, ' I'm



afraid last night put an end to the strawberries.'

'Strawberries?' asked the lady with a quick smile. 'Ah, you know? It is very strange, monsieur, how quick all the stories run about —about me, I mean. Tell me what they say. But, monsieur, will you not sit down? It is tiresome to stand. It was "great fun" —as you say.'

'The story?'

'You have not heard? No? Not how I went last night in a cabaret, The Five Adzes, and drank beer with the men? And, gran Dio, how they sang! It was just like the Grand Opera.'

This Lady Alicia Gaveston — this the Countess of Quorne? It is not too much to say that the curate was shocked, and began to think it just as well that he had not brought Bessy. No wonder she was 'hail fellow, well-met,' with vagabond painters. Tales of the increasing depravity of the upper classes had reached Deepweald, and Gaveston had always refused to believe scandal of English ladies, and of his own order, for he had passed that extreme youth,

when men think it fine and knowing to believe all evil. But when it came to a Countess of Quorne going into a village public-house, and drinking beer with the men—surely it was time for Church and State to part, and for the world to come to an end. He knew the countess was Bohémienne, and he was not strait-laced ; but this was going too far.

His face had not much expression, but it is precisely expressionless faces that are most capable of looking shocked most readily. The lady must have seen it over her fan ; her glance passed to his white cravat, and then to the ends of his long whiskers, and a smile of malice passed for a moment through her eyes.

‘ Yes. It was great fun—as you say. We drank beer out of pewter, very bad beer ; and they smoked, oh, such tobacco—I smell all over of it now—it is in my hair. And I flirted with a gamekeeper, till I made the fille de chambre divinely jealous. It is better, yes, than Park Lane. Ah, you should see how they looked when I sang to them. You know The Five Adzes, monsieur ? No ?’

‘ At Laxton ?’

‘That is his name. I forget my English—but never mind.’

‘You have been a great deal abroad?’

‘Abroad? Why, I come from abroad now, when I came to London. I like England, but I like abroad best—there it is free. I like to be free.’

‘Exactly so,’ said the curate, without a tinge of hypocrisy.

‘And The Five Adzes,’ said the lady, resolved to enjoy the expression on the curate’s face as long as possible. ‘I think I shall go there again on Saturday evening. They are better than the great people—Corpo di Bacco! It is stiff here. I am republican to the heart; I love the poor.’

The curate was growing aghast with dismay. Everything seemed turning upside down. Of course, as a clergyman, he loved the poor too; but the phrase, as a phrase, sounded odd to him, and a republican countess, and that countess a Gaveston, was a monstrosity. What did Lord Quorne say to it all? But as to that, he knew that Lord Quorne’s heart, though sound, was a cucumber; and he strongly surmised that his cousin Alicia was one who

would have more to say to her husband than her husband to her. But what would the county say? Counties are not easily put down, even by countesses.

‘There are not many really poor in your own neighbourhood,’ said Gaveston, feeling himself talking to his cousin Alicia more and more as if she were a stranger in blood, as in all other things, ‘but there are many in Deepweald; and in my own parish, St. Anselm’s——’

‘Ah! I will see. And then I met there a young man, a painter; a very handsome young man. Do you know who?’

‘Ah—that’s how she picked up Gordon!’ thought Gaveston. ‘And she invited him to her house, I suppose!’

‘Oh yes, I know him; that is, I used to—at Oxford, I mean.’

‘Oxford? Ah yes, I know Oxford. There are a great many young men. Who is he?’

‘Fancy, picking up a painter in a pot-house, and asking him to Hinchford!’ thought Gaveston, now thoroughly disgusted. And he felt a pang of not unnatural jealousy too; here was he, Lady Quorne’s own cousin,

asked to Hinchford in a way that was nothing less than an insult, while the door seemed opened to any chance vagabond who chose to enter. He was a good-natured young man, but he did not feel good-natured just then, and small blame to him.

‘Oh, his father is a cotton-spinner at Manchester, or one of those places.’


Deepweald looked down upon Manchester.

‘A cotton-spinner?’

‘Yes—a manufacturer, you know. He was well-off at Oxford—at least, he seemed so, for there’s no knowing anything about people in trade. Then he went off without a degree, and was going to be a barrister, but I suppose the truth is, they were ruined, and he had to do what he could. He seems to have done nothing but knock about all over the world it seems—anyhow, he hasn’t a penny now. He told me so.’

‘He has been rich, and is poor? And an artist, then—a real artist, monsieur?’

‘He told me he is a painter, and hasn’t got a penny. I should have thought he could have done better than that—but I’m afraid there’s something wrong.’



‘It is always wrong to be poor,’ said the lady, softly, and, the curate thought, a little bitterly. ‘And real artists are often poor. Never mind, it is the world. I am glad I have seen you, so that I know. I like that young man. He is handsome, and he is alive. It is good to go into The Five Adzes, now and then. Are you poor?’

The curate blushed and stared. He thought of Bessy, and did not know what to say. But she did not seem to remember her own question.

‘Yes, I like him,’ she went on. ‘And he was good about the garde-chasse and the strawberries, and the femme de chambre. He gave me a lesson; I keep some temper, I. Yes, if he is young, and an artist, and good-hearted, he would be poor. But never mind.’

‘He said he was going to paint your portrait.’

‘Ah!’ she said with a bright look of pleasure. ‘That is a good idea. ‘Yes, he is to paint my picture—I shall sit for him. Does he live at what you call—Laxton?’

‘I don’t know where he lives. I haven’t

seen him for years. He seems to be tramping about the country now.'

'What is his name, monsieur, if you please?'

'She asks him to Hinchford, and doesn't even know his name!'—'Gordon—Walter Gordon.'

'Gordon!'

The bright smile passed with a vengeance. All her languid, easy grace of posture grew rigid, and she started as if a snake had stung her. All tragedy came back into her face and her frown, and the music left the voice as she almost hissed out the name. Gaveston had never seen such a transformation in his life before. He too started, almost alarmed.

'Yes—Gordon. Walter Gordon. That's his name.'

'Ah! I have pain sometimes—but it is soon over. There, monsieur.' And she fanned herself back into resolute sunshine, let herself lie back on the sofa again, and took a new caprice—utter silence, as if the curate of St. Anselm's, and her own cousin, were a nobody.

He sat back in his chair, pulling his

whiskers, in the resigned state of a man who has fairly made up his mind that he really has nothing to say, and has given up trying. And so they must have sat for full five minutes, he embarrassed, she at ease, when a footman came in with a note on a silver salver. He brought it to Gaveston. Gaveston took the note, looked at the lady, who bowed permission. The note was in Bessy's hand. What could it be? He read it, and turned pale.

'Come at once; I have sent a fly. Little Bessy is very ill.—Bessy.'

All the poor fellow's shyness and embarrassment were swept away. He loved his wife well, though mildly; but he dearly loved the child who had put heart even into whisker-pulling. His own heart sank as he handed the note to the lady. She looked surprised at first; but she read it.

'You have a little girl?' she said after a curious look at his white choker, as if it were awry. 'Ah, monsieur.' The words sounded like a deep sigh.

'Only one,' he said. 'I must go.'

'Only one? Yes—it is always that; it is



always the only one.' A new mood was on her — the curate was too much taken up with what he might find at home, to catch an accent in her voice that sounded more like fierceness than sympathy. 'Yes—you must go. But wait—an envelope and paper,' she said to the footman. 'And quick—you hear?' she said, with a little stamp and a frown.


'Is she going to write to Bessy?' thought the curate, miserably.

But she only scribbled a word or two, with her back to him. Then she handed him an envelope, addressed in the most sprawling of hands, simply to 'Bessy.'

'Now, monsieur—go. Open this yourself when you are at home—not before.'

'I am so sorry,' said the curate, whose instinct of politeness was not to be forgotten. 'Pray make my excuses to Lord Quorne. Perhaps—another time——'

She saw his emotion, and her eyes, which had in this short interview well-nigh passed into every passion under the sun, were now filled with tears of sympathy. She pressed his hand; and in another moment he was in the fly, posting back to Deepweald after his



fears, as fast as he could bribe the driver to make the wretched screw go.

The poor fellow was not thinking of his cousin now. But had he been, and could his thoughts have shown her to him, he would have seen her pacing, striding rather, from end to end of the white drawing-room, as if she were in a prison, and burning to be free. There was no longer the fierce frown on her face that he had seen there and wondered at; but her face had the mask off—it is doubtful if her mirror even had seen her as she was now. And it is doubtful if any man now would have called her beautiful. Can you tell what I mean by fixed and ingrained rage?—not the effect of passion, or of many passions, but a savage look, as of some dangerous animal whom the hounds are after. It was as if some heavy blow had fallen upon her, and left the mark for ever, just as it fell. It is hard to describe; but if she knew that look of hers, and wished to feel herself beautiful, it is not wonderful that she should dislike solitude. Walter Gordon had thought the storm over the coffee unsurpassable in its

dramatic intensity. He should have seen her now—only one never sees such a look as this on the stage. It was unspeakably sullen and cold and full of pain—and hungry, too, in a strange kind of way.

There is nothing much more terrible in life, than to follow one's flying thoughts of ill with a slow horse, and a driver that will not put him to a pace beyond his immutable routine. The Medes and Persians, combined, had regulated the pace of the screw from The George at Deepweald. Gaveston felt as if riding a race between life and death; life creeping after, death galloping before. He was a single-minded man, and as yet, his heart had no room for anything but impatience. Would the milestones never come? He had never thought that a journey could be so long. He tried closing his eyes, to prevent their watching for the milestones and so keeping them away. He looked at his watch a hundred times—and, strange to say, the minutes galloped while the fly crawled. Life was creeping along the road, death flying round the dial.

At last the beautiful gray cathedral tower,

rosy once more in the sunset, just as we used to see it and love it years ago, stood out against the sky. Restorers are doing their accursed work on it now, and bad luck to them, for no mortal eye will ever see the exquisite rosy gray of Deepweald tower again. No wonder Deepweald looked down on Manchester and on everywhere. It was very beautiful. Do you remember how it looked—years ago—one broiling day in June, when the Reverend Reginald Gaveston read Tennyson to a Dorcas meeting in general, and to Bessy Swann in particular, while the Deepweald eleven were hard at work on King's Mead ; and he, fast bowler as he was, had given up the sport and the cider-cup and all, to read poetry, that neither he nor his audience understood, among fifteen ladies in a furnace, for the sake of a pair of gray eyes waiting for him now ? He remembered it all, you may be sure—it was just such another evening as this, but for the heat, and the cathedral tower with its cawing guards looking just the same. But the eyes ? He thought of them very tenderly. Were they still watching for him, and wondering when

he would come ? Or were they——he could not bear to think of it, and wiped his own. And what had that cathedral tower not seen since Deepweald was a town ? it was half a comfort even to Gaveston to feel that it was there ; a tower of sympathy—the visible part of joy and sorrow to all in common who lived under its shade.

. At last he was under its shade, through the Close, and at his own door. He forgot to look at the windows to see if the blinds were drawn.

‘ Bessy ?’

His wife herself had opened the door.

‘ Oh, I am so sorry,’ she said gladly. ‘ Look here !’

And there, surely enough, was Bessy in her cradle—as well, considering all things, as need be. It seemed a shame to have wasted so much emotion.

‘ Thank God !’ said the curate. He had a heart, though not a very lively one, and it came out every now and then. ‘ But then—if she wasn’t ill, Bessy——’

‘ But she was ill—and she frightened me. so I sent for Doctor Adams, but he was out,

and so was the assistant, and I couldn't send for Mr. Black all at once—and so—I didn't know what might happen——'

'Well ?'

'And I sent for mamma too—and I'm glad I did, for she's seen me like that dozens of times, she says, and she put baby to rights in no time. Another time I shall know what to do,' she said proudly ; and I am not sure that she would be altogether sorry if it did happen again, that she might set it to rights, as her mother had done before her. Mothers are a peculiar people.

'And you're sure she's all right—sure ?'

'There wasn't time to call back the fly—it had gone. But oh, I am so sorry I've brought you back from Hinchford ; but I couldn't help it, when baby might have died. Have you dined, dear ?'

'No,' said the curate. He could not help feeling a little vexed ; and no wonder. To have swallowed his pride and not his dinner was certainly more than a little hard.

'I'll send for some chops. I'll never do it again. But baby, you see——'

'Never mind, dear,' said Gaveston, resum-

ing his severely mild dignity of demeanour. 'It is vexing, but never mind. After all, it's perhaps what I deserve, for going to Hinchford. Yes—chops will do very well, Bessy.'

They had to do very well ; for marketing in Deepweald after sunset was unknown, except on Saturdays.

'I am so sorry,' said Bessy over again. 'But you see, baby—— Tell me, dear ; you've seen the countess, and the earl.'

'I've not seen Lord Quorne. But I had a long talk with Cousin Alicia in the white drawing-room.'

'Oh, that is charming ! Tell me about her, please ! Was she glad to see you ? Do you think there's any chance of baby's being Alicia—a lovely name ; Alicia Gaveston—quite aristocratic ? And how was she dressed ?'

'She was dressed—let me see---in black something——'

'Velvet ?'

'No. It was more like lace than velvet. It was lace, I suppose. And she wore pearls—very fine pearls.'

'Yes.'



‘That’s all, I think. And she had a black fan.’

‘Black lace and pearls. She must be in mourning. No diamonds?’

‘Not that I saw. I think, though, she had a diamond ring.’

Bessy had indulged some visions of copying the countess at first hand; but black lace and pearls were obviously not to be thought of. ‘And how does she do her hair?’

‘Let me see, it’s golden.’

‘Surely not, Reginald! Why, where were your eyes? Surely it’s brown. In the photographs it’s always brown.’

‘I’m afraid, Bessy, that—in fact, I believe there is a fashion in London of making brown hair into golden. And I am the more convinced of it from the fact that Alicia’s hair used to match her eyes, which were dark, very dark gray.’

‘And what’s she like to talk to?’

‘Bessy, I’m sorry to say that I’m glad you did not go to Hinchford.’

That she had not been invited was ignored between husband and wife by tacit convention.

‘Why, dear?’



‘Because Cousin Alicia may be a countess, but she’s not a proper person to know. There’ll be a scandal some day.’

‘Good gracious, Reginald!’

‘She goes into the pothouse at Laxton, and drinks, and smokes, and sings in the bar-parlour. She swears—in foreign languages, it is true, but still she swears. She picks up vagabonds, whose names she doesn’t know, and invites them to Hinchford. She talks about how she flirts with the servants. And she’s a professed republican. I suppose she’s lived in France till she’s forgotten how to talk English, and doesn’t know if she’s on her head or her heels.’

‘Reginald! How dreadful! How shocking!’

‘It’s true. I was thinking of how to remonstrate with her when your note came.’

‘But perhaps you’re mistaken? The ways of the aristocracy, you know——’

‘You forget, Bessy, that right is right and wrong is wrong.’

Poor Bessy! All her castles had come down with a run. Reginald’s foot once within Hinchford, what might not follow?

Anything—everything. He would be reconciled to his grand relations. Lord Quorne would give him a living. She would be invited to dine and sleep, and she would be able to talk about the Countess of Quorne as ‘my relative,’ or ‘my cousin by marriage,’ or ‘my little girl’s god-mother,’ as the case might be. And now her own husband had as good as told her that Lady Quorne was not respectable! The Countess of Quorne not respectable! What then did respectability mean?

And what was she to say in Deepweald, about the great Lady Quorne?


Musing upon all these things, as she folded up her husband’s best clothes, a letter fell from the breast-pocket. She took it up, it was addressed in a strange handwriting to ‘Bessy.’

As she was Bessy, and as she knew of no other that could read, she naturally opened it, supposing it to be some message to her that her husband had forgotten to give her. It proved to contain two Bank of England notes of fifty pounds each, and a slip of paper on which was written, ‘For the poor of the parish of St. Anselm.’

## CHAPTER VII.

### ARTIST AND—ARTIST.

THERE was a room in Hinchford, chosen with more than professional reference to light and shade, and fitted up as a private studio for the real Lady Quorne, concerning whom so strange a repute had been launched in Deepweald. It was indeed an extra-typical studio, such as none but amateurs are ever known to dream of, and furnished as if by half-a-dozen painters of different schools working in opposition to one another. Everything that had struck Lady Quorne's fancy elsewhere had been gathered together—suits of old armour, because she had seen them in Black's studio; oriental bric-à-brac, because she had admired it in Mr. White's; pots and pans,



because these had ruled supreme in Mr. Green's. The result was barbaric incongruity, which, nevertheless, was more picturesque, if the truth must be told, than what mostly came out of it.

In a chair of the curule order, one sunny morning, sat she whom Gaveston had so oddly, and yet so naturally, taken for Cousin Alicia, dressed, in Genoese fashion, in a black lace mantilla, and holding her fan half closed before her. She was in one of her good humours to-day, smiling and pleased, and with a cat-like enjoyment of the summer sun. One almost expected to hear her purr. It was not a usual mood with her, and, indeed, she had no usual mood, as Walter Gordon had found out for himself in the last seven days. For it was he who was at this moment trying to make her picture; and, it must be owned, thus far only trying, and, at the moment, not trying over-hard.

‘It is very comfortable here,’ said Made-moiselle Clari. ‘I like the sun. I feel like a peach to-day—one of milord’s peaches.’

‘Somebody or other used to dip his brush in sunbeams,’ said Walter. ‘I wish

I could get some of the sun into my picture.'

'Oh, never mind that! I like to be painted. It is so good as going to sleep, and being stroked in a doze. Do you know how strange it is to be here?'

'Why?'

'Among all these old things—and sitting in a lace veil in the sun. Oh, monsieur, do you know how old I am?'

'Let me see. I think Venus was two thousand at the siege of Troy. Suppose we say three thousand—and that will make you a thousand years younger.'

'Three thousand? Surely, no. But you are right. I have felt more old.'

'Of course you have. I was awfully old at twenty. I am not now.'

'I like being with you.' She spoke so much as if she meant it, and so suddenly, that Walter, though the sentiment did not seem to him either unusual or unnatural, almost coloured with the pleasure of hearing so frank an expression of it. 'I like happy people. They are so—so—so—what shall I say?' she said lazily, as if it were impossible

to think and bask at the same time. 'So—happy.'

Walter thought that she also looked exquisitely happy as she sunned herself.

'Do you know,' he said, as he made a rather random stroke, 'I think I shall call this picture "Felicità?"'

'Felicità?'

'Yes; because that means all happiness and all good-fortune, doesn't it? And you must be the happiest and most fortunate woman I ever knew.'

'Have you, then, known such very unhappy women, monsieur?'

She still spoke lazily, but her fan gave a little impatient flutter, as if by way of protest against something or other—perhaps against the unwonted disuse to which it was being condemned. But, lazily as she spoke, Walter caught a touch either of melancholy, or sentiment, or coquetry—it was hard to say which of the three.

'Well—no. Most women are neither happy nor unhappy—that is, they are very much like men. But you see, I was thinking of what I should like to be if I were a woman, and what you are.'

‘You would like to be like me?’

‘Like whom else? You are greater than any queen.’

‘Queens can do as they like.’

‘Not at all. But you can do what you like, and can be queen in every country. And then you have your Art, mademoiselle. I always think, if I were not a painter, I would be a prima donna—not a tenor; tenors are mostly imbeciles. But to rule the world without effort, and just because you are what you are—why, yours is the most glorious life in all the world. Yes,’ he went on, always ready to warm up into a flight of enthusiasm, ‘I can’t imagine anything more glorious than to live for the sake of Art, and have one’s reward into the bargain—one’s earthly reward, I mean. Of course, I know your ambition is a villa on Como—but then what a divine path to get to it! Yours must be the ideal life. I must call the picture “*Felicità*.”’

Their talk implies some intimacy. And, in fact, since the casual meeting in *The Five Adzes*, their life as fellow-guests at Hinchford had brought these two together by a common process of natural affinity, which


mostly looks like contrast. The prima donna, being no longer in her very first youth, was naturally attracted, more than a girl would have been, by the mere good looks and easy high spirits of the young painter; and he was as much flattered by her notice as any man would have been. Perhaps he would have felt a little less flattered if he had known that Gaveston's report of his poverty had been a main reason for her notice, which he believed the result of his own favourite qualities. But so it had certainly been; at least, in the first instance. There were other guests at Hinchford, and the prima donna had made a point of asserting her independence and superiority to conventionalities, by prominently attaching herself to him through the first dull evening of cucumbers and the musical-glasses. If he had been in her eyes the rich semi-amateur he was, she would have treated him as cavalierly as she had treated the others; and this story would never have been told.

The portrait-painting, as well as a common and separate recollection of The Five Adzes, had ripened the original comradeship at



Hinchford, until the portrait became less a work of art than an excuse for an idle morning talk, when neither of the two had anything else to do, which was pretty often. Neither could manage to cultivate interest enough in the cucumbers to last through a whole summer morning, and Mademoiselle Clari was too great a personage to give, even for friendship's sake, singing lessons to a Countess of Quorne. The countess, though the greatest in the land round Deepweald, was nobody in the greater world where Clari reigned almost, if not quite, supreme.

Walter Gordon was first a little interested, then flattered, then a great deal interested, then a great deal flattered, until he found the great attraction of Hinchford in her whom artistically he had affected to look down upon. He had, after all, never studied scientifically the genus *prima donna* ; and, if Clari was a type, he found it decidedly worth studying—at least, he thought so. There was one great and special attraction about her—he never knew precisely what she was going to be. And that was good practice for a painter. If anything went the least wrong, or even for



the very reason that everything refused to go wrong, there was the storm in the coffee-cup in one form or another. One day she was gay, another sullen, another both at once; to-day peaceful and—as she herself put it with some conscious insight—like nothing so much as one of Lord Quorne's peaches growing in a particularly sunny corner. There was excitement in her companionship, like reading a book in which it is impossible to guess what the next incident is going to be, even for the most practised of readers. The interest was not the less because she was very far indeed from being a good talker. She was not even witty; and never, by any chance, said anything that would have been remembered—had it not been hers. She would at times reveal vistas of ignorance that were a little bewildering, scarcely compensated by any special knowledge of the world or of human nature. Indeed, she seemed to read all the people with whom she had come in contact through special glasses of her own; so that Walter occasionally caught himself wondering and thinking about himself—not, What am I? but in the form of, What does

she think I am? And the questions, he became aware, meant very different things.

‘You will make a mistake,’ said Clari, ‘if you call your picture “*Felicità*.”’

‘Why? But perhaps so. The fact is, I don’t know how to paint you; I ought to make a new portrait every day. Do you know you are never the same, hardly two minutes together? I get on very well one day, and the next it is no more you than it is Lady Quorne, and I have to begin all over again.’

Clari drew herself together, as if trying to get deeper into the sunshine.

‘It is good to talk to somebody; and I like to talk to you. I don’t care to talk to most people. I like them to talk to me, because they always say good things. But they never seem to care for what I say; and so they don’t know me, and think like you do. You are an artist.’

‘I want to be.’

‘Then how can you talk all that nonsense about Art you do? I thought it was only amateurs and people like Lady Quorne who talk about Art like that.’

‘Like that?’

‘Yes; as if it was a game of play.’

‘Do you mean you don’t love your Art, mademoiselle?’

‘Love it! What for?’

‘Surely, if any on earth loves Art it ought to be you.’

‘Do you know what I feel like, sitting here in the sun? Oh, I know what Lady Quorne would say—but do you? Well, it makes me feel so old—ever so old—and among all these old things and in this lace veil! It is not the first time I have sat in the sun, *Corpo di Bacco!* But not often; and that makes me feel when I have done that all the more.’

Walter Gordon felt her falling into a new mood, and scarcely made any pretence of painting further. He must learn this new Clari that was going to be. But she only touched the new ground, and laughed, as she said: ‘The idea of you calling me “*Felicità!*” I wanted you to know me, monsieur.’ And the laugh died away suddenly.

‘Don’t I know you?’

‘Not much. But, ah! never mind. Let

me see the picture. I am tired. There, let me see. Is that me ?

‘Not in the least you.’

‘But I want to see myself—what I am.’

‘Then I’m afraid I must lend you my eyes. My hands won’t do.’

‘I want to know,’ she said, quite simply and naturally, but with a frown that drew her black eyebrows together, and in which he seemed to read a depth foreign to, and yet closely connected, in some occult way, with her passing mood whatever it might be. ‘Your name is Gordon. Why?’

‘It is my father’s ; I don’t know else why. And it is not an uncommon name.’

‘No ?’

‘It’s rather common than otherwise, but a good one. And I’m particularly proud of it. Of course I don’t suppose you ever heard of——’ ‘Comus,’ he was going to say, but reflected in time that he would only be exposing the ignorance of a great English work, on the part of an Italian singer. That was his family pride—the forgotten work of the forgotten uncle, who had run away from fame, and had never been heard of again.

Clari began to play rapidly with her fan. Whether that special summer sun, in that special studio, under special circumstances that he could not have any knowledge of, was filling her with old recollections or associations, or whether she was merely moved by a causeless caprice, she seemed in a mood of half confidence, half reticence—the two things mostly go together.

‘It vexes me, it enrages me, you are called Gordon. I hate the name.’

‘You have known it before?’

‘And you would call your picture “*Felicità*?”’

Walter felt himself on the eve of a story, that the faintest symptom of curiosity would cut short at the outset. He returned to his picture, and pretended to busy himself without seeming to heed or to listen.

Doubtless the sun, and something else, were affecting her more than she knew—far more than he could dimly imagine. Everybody knew that Mademoiselle Clari lived alone, for Prosper and her *femme-de-chambre* were nobody. Had she not been notoriously respectable, she would never have been at

Hinchford. And, as Walter himself was old enough to have learned, she was arrived at a point of life when a lonely life, in man or woman, begins to tell with full force. A story she must have had, though she kept it so completely and hazily in the background that nobody thought of her having one, and assumed that she had been made, full fledged, like prime donne in general. And, at that point of life, a story becomes a burden. We want to begin a new one—at least to make confession of the old, and to receive absolution. We need a confessor ; and are apt to choose our confessor oddly, supposing we are women, and have no priest or doctor. Men are better off—they can bore their friends ; and besides, their stories are very seldom their lives, as women's stories are.

But his inattention took long to pique her. At last however :

‘ Call it “ *Infelicità*,” monsieur—Unhappiness, if you please. Yes, I am very gay, and just as unhappy as the sun is bright, and as the day is long. And the sun is bright, even here, in England. It is so bright and warm. it wants to make me cry.’

‘You have a very intense nature, made-moiselle—that is all.’

‘No? I don’t know about nature, but I know about me. I felt just like this before, when I was not like what I am now; when I was very young and very poor, and wanted everything in the world—all the diamonds and all the joy.’

‘And you have them?’

‘Oh, the diamonds and the joy. And I still want everything in the world.’

‘What would you like?’

‘How do I know? I did not know then. I know what I did—I went out into the Carnival, and I sold myself to be what I am. No, monsieur—not what you think; it was to the devil, not to a man. It was to what you call Art; and then you say I ought to love Art, when it has but given me what I do not want. I hate diamonds, monsieur, and I hate joy. I hate the people when they  
• make me into a queen—that cannot get what she wants nor do what she will.’

Walter could not help smiling as he remembered the history of The Five Adzes, and how it seemed essential to her self-con-



tent that she should not be without the applause of boors, for want of princes. And he felt tolerably sure, that if she were defrauded of a single bouquet, she would be considerably inconsistent with her present mood. And yet there could be no question but that her present mood was just as real as the other, and surely deeper.

‘And so,’ she went on, with fresh eagerness, ‘I want to go out into the Carnival again. I feel here like I felt in Rome. I do not know what I would find there; but I want to go. I remember all I saw—all the dresses, and the diamonds, and the great ladies in them; I have often seen that, but did not feel the same as when I was poor, nor remember. It is the sun that makes me, remember, or something. There is the Carnival all going on round about outside, just as then. It was in The Adzes, and the Garde-chasse and the Femme-de-chambre were in all the diamonds and fine clothes. And you are in the Carnival, too, because you are young, and happy, and poor. I do not know my way, but I want to go. I am tired of hating; it is hard to hate, with the sun all over me. I

wonder if I would sell myself for what I want now ; but I do not know. I would not sell myself to Art for it again. Art is a devil—Corpo di Bacco—No !

Surely this was no mood. And yet, was it the real Clari ? Walter, for the first time in his life, seemed to be hearing a real woman's real cry out of the mists through which she could scarcely see that her heart was real. It was no mockery of sentiment, at any rate, such as he had studied at Lindenheim and elsewhere. It was new to him, and it moved him into beginning to understand.

‘ You are a man ; do you know what it is to hate a man ? Or is it that only what women do ? But—yes ; I am tired of hating. I should like to see him die, and to know who killed him, and then to rest and have done. No ; not what you think. I would not stab him or poison him—not at all. I would do to him what he has done to me ; no more. If he has taken but one eye of me, I would not take his two.’

She settled herself back into her seat, and went on with a sort of calm satisfaction :

‘ I should like to make him feel what Art

does mean, and what it is of cruelty. I should like to make him feel what a mother does, gran Dio, when she is robbed of her heart and of her child, if a man can feel like that! I should like to make his god, his art, into a curse for him. I should like to pay back the sale-money at good interest. And then I should like to do nothing more but find a little love—I know not what—when I have done with hating, for I should have no malice when I had done.’

Walter kept himself busy at his easel. But there was one moment when he almost shuddered at a certain clear, cold, luxurious tone in which she dwelt on the idea of revenge, upon some unknown man, for some mysterious and unimaginable injury. And it was all the more impassive, because it seemed utterly removed from the hint of a suspicion on her part that her desire was evil. It was simply the eye-for-an-eye doctrine, preached by those of old time, and might have come down by inheritance to a Hebrew, had she not been—on the best of best authority—pure Italian. He did not know how to answer; he was beginning to find himself

drawn into an unreclaimed region of human nature, such as few men find guides into.

‘You see,’ she went on, ‘it is hard to live without some things. I do not love, and if I do not hate I should die.’

‘I am afraid you have in some way suffered cruelly,’ said Walter at last—stupidly enough; but then he was suddenly forced into a strange country, and did not know his way. ‘But cannot one not love without hating?’

‘How do I know? Would you not hate one who——’

‘Perhaps I could tell you, if I knew all.’

‘Oh, how would you know? You believe in Art—you,’ she said, scornfully. ‘You think it is a great thing—how would you tell? You would be a *prima donna*—like me. I want to go out into the wide air. Do you think it pleases me, hating? Not at all. But one must live. We will go and see milord’s cucumbers.’

They went; and found not only milord’s cucumbers, but milord. The contest was be-

coming exciting; and Lord Quorne was seldom to be found more than half-a-yard from the frame. Long before she had reached them, Clari had become so gracious and radiant again that only Walter, who knew, could see a trace of any excitement in her. But he did see in her scarcely yet separated brows and a certain distant look in her eyes, what proved to him that what he had seen, was, for once, no passing mood. If it had been, every trace would have disappeared long before; in an instant, indeed. A minute's continuance of an emotion, however slight the sign, was, so far as it went, a revelation of the real Clari.

‘Look there!’ said Lord Quorne, with triumph. By-the-way, he had taken rather a fancy to Walter Gordon, who, though not given to watch these growths of nature, was able to take a sympathetic interest in any sort of contest; and, in short, generally found himself agreeable to most people. ‘Look there—it grows! Hinchford will win yet, Gordon—will win yet, mademoiselle. Gordon, does Lady Quorne want you to-morrow? No? That’s well. You shall drive over with

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me to Deepweald, if you've got nothing better to do.'


'And my picture must wait,' said Clari, sweetly but reproachfully.

'I must wait, mademoiselle,' said Walter.  
'I must think, before I begin, upon it all over again.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AUS LINDENHEIM.

It was quite true that Walter Gordon found himself incapable of doing what he thought justice to the prima donna. It must have been owing to the painter's want of skill ; but that was not for him to believe. And his failure, whatever the cause, made him think about her doubly. He did not think less of herself, but more of her. And so the drive over to Deepweald with Lord Quorne was not particularly lively. The earl was thinking about cucumbers ; his companion about what is apt to prove another and yet more rapidly-growing gourd, such as is planted in heads or hearts, and needs no microscope for watching. Walter Gordon had arrived at the stage of thinking Mademoiselle Clari the most inte-



resting woman in the world, demanding sympathetic study, rather than light criticism from an outside point of view like other men and women. They had already, he felt, set up a tacit understanding of friendship, and it was clear that yesterday in the studio she had been within an ace of giving him confidences, of the kind that mostly have to be wrung from women. Of what nature could they be? It was clear she had a story—a woman's story; that the surface Clari, all moods and whims, was very far indeed from being the true Clari, whom he had almost surprised without her domino. He felt he had almost seen through the last and inmost veil of a woman's real heart; and that is a strangely exciting thing for a man when it happens to him for the first time. But thus far it had only been almost—the hieroglyphics had been brought into view, but lacked interpretation. That the true Clari might not prove particularly amiable was nothing; one does not ask if intense women are lovable—one loves them, or, if one does not reach that point, accepts them for what they are, and prefers them for being what nature made them.



During the drive he amused himself with piecing together the fragmentary suggestions she had allowed to melt or break from her yesterday. They were not much. She was more intensely a woman than an artist. Indeed, her art appeared to be at least no part of her, if it were not foreign to her altogether. That was strange; for though Walter Gordon had known many impostors, men and women, who followed art by way of trade, these invariably gave the world to understand that they condescended to eat bread and cheese for art's sake, and did not follow art for the sake of bread and cheese; Clari, with all the right in the world to take the highest ground, had taken the very lowest, and professed not merely cynical indifference but absolute scorn for the art that had made her Clari. Her devotion to it she seemed to regard as an evil fate that pursued her. And yet, with all her unquestionable earnestness, he could not altogether accept her sincerity. From what he had seen and guessed about her from first impressions at The Five Adzes, and from what he knew of her now, he could not

conceive of her as existing without all the circumstances of triumph, of which she professed to be so contemptuously weary. It was as if she had two natures—one just as real as the other—opposed, discordant, and yet making a fascinating kind of harmony, to which he as yet had not the key.

In short, Walter Gordon was amusing himself only too well with his speculations about a woman, with whom he had to admit he was in the most ignorant sympathy. Of course, such speculations run into castle-building—very airy castles that one enters like a visitor on a tour, rambles about a little, and comes out from, at will and pleasure. Suppose, for instance, that he should end in setting up a grand passion for the prima donna? It would undoubtedly be a distinction in itself, and give life a great deal of new interest. Of course, it would be a case of ‘Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther’—he was not going to make himself unhappy about any woman in the world. It is so easy to regulate grand passions—in theory. There was every inducement to give charm to the enterprise. There was nothing of the common-

place about her, not even in the way she moved her fan. And—by no means her least charm, though it lay in the background—there was no more chance of such a romance ending in a question of marriage, than in any other impossibility. It would simply mean a pleasant flower-garden in the middle of life, where he might plant exotic emotions, enjoy their fragrance, and train them as he pleased.

It did not occur to him that playing at love, however sentimentally, with a woman who can hate, is rather a fiery kind of game. Women like Clari, who see things not as they are, but as they seem, take strange fancies into their heads sometimes, and stranger things have happened than that a woman with a soul of fire in her should choose for its victim a most unheroic idol. And, if love there was to be, she would not understand loving a little—indeed, a man who instinctively dreads passion, as nine men out of ten dread it, should for consistency's sake have fled, and burnt behind him all his castles in the air. After what he had seen yesterday, the idea of a pleasant flirtation with Clari should have been too outrageously absurd—and a good deal more than absurd.

Walter Gordon parted from the earl at Deepweald. Lord Quorne had his own business to attend to, and Walter's first obligation was to see the cathedral—not that he cared much about seeing a cathedral, but all places have their rights, and visitors their duties. He strolled into the Close, stood under the elms and looked up at the tower, and put off the evil minute of making acquaintance with the verger. It was still obstinately fine weather after the storm—now more than a week ago. After all, why should he trouble himself with orthodox lionising? It was pleasant to lounge about with a cigar, and to build castles in the sun. Of course he would have to do the sight-seeing before he went back to Hinchford, but five minutes would be enough for that, and there was plenty of time.

The Close was as empty as usual. Even the rooks were away foraging, and the houses round had always an air of living altogether to and for themselves. He lounged up and down for nearly half an hour, in idle luxury, enjoying the feeling of being altogether out of the common world and in company with

the most filmily delicate of day-dreams. He was on the path under the elms, when he suddenly heard a light step before him. He instinctively moved aside to let a lady pass, and then looking, saw a pair of eyes. Clari's? No; but their twins.


‘Miss March! Fräulein Celia!’

‘Herr Walter!’

No, they were not Clari's eyes after all. Size and colour do not make eyes. He had seen every expression in Clari's eyes save one, and that one he saw now.

Of nobody in the world had he less been thinking, as he walked up and down in front of the cathedral. Some dim recollection, or rather impression, he must have had that Celia and Deepweald were connected; but then Lindenheim was so very long ago. How can a man be expected to bear all his friends in mind for ever? He had known people half over Europe, well and intimately, whose very names had gone out of his mind. He had flirted with every girl in Lindenheim—why should he think of one more than another at odd moments of leisure?

And yet, here under the elms in Deepweald, and in the English sun, came back, in a very breath of spring, that half-forgotten walk to Waaren with the shy English girl who now stood before him, and whom years had not changed beyond recognition. There were no incidents of any other friendship that he would have remembered so well. Of course she was changed—very much changed. Despite the eyes, he had doubted when he said ‘Miss March ;’ but she was not at all changed as his recognition led him back into the old Lindenheim form of ‘Fräulein Celia.’ She had grown, to begin with—not in inches, perhaps, but in look and bearing. She was dressed very plainly, even for a country town, in dark materials ; but they became her well. Her figure had filled out, and her face had rounded. It was still without roses, but the old sallowness and meagreness had turned to a delicate contour and a pure paleness, with more youth in it than at eighteen. Her lips were as sweet in their curve as ever, and now they smiled—and so did her eyes. The features did not look so prominent now that the cheeks were less hollow, and the old



decision of chin and brow, though still there, was toned down and softened. It was a very charming face, thought Herr Walter, and had fulfilled infinitely more than it promised at Lindenheim—where, indeed, it had promised nothing at all. And he could not misread the frankly happy look that shone into it as she answered, ‘Herr Walter!’

‘Fräulein Celia! Aus Lindenheim! Is it really you?’

‘You are really Herr Walter!’

‘Am I? But—we were right—do you remember—when we used to call ourselves so old at Lindenheim? You must have been growing younger every year. But only to think of meeting you here!’

‘Why not? I was born in Deepweald—at least I have lived here always. But it is strange to meet you.’

‘Why? I have always lived everywhere. But I am glad fortune has led me to Deepweald. Why, it is like old times. Of course—yes—I remember the first day we met. You told me you lived at Deepweald. Your father is organist here. Do you remember that walk to Waaren?’

Did she remember ! Was it not the date whence her history of the world began ?

‘How it all comes back to me—meeting you ! It was your first day. We set out with Lotte, and then she dropped off and I saw you safe through the Rosenthal. We talked about Schumann and Palestrina. I used to schwärm for Schumann in those days, and flirt with Ilma. You remember her ? I can, when I try—very hard. Then you scolded me for making that genius-fellow—what’s his name ?—blow the bellows in church. It was quite right of you, Fräulein Celia. And you wouldn’t dance ; and we walked back by the light of the moon. Ah, I remember it all as if it had been yesterday ; and it must be half-a-dozen years ago. Well, a great deal has happened since then. But how is it you are at Deepweald still ? Of course I remember you came from Deepweald ; but you were to be the prize star of Lindenheim.’

‘Oh, I’m one of the failures, I suppose,’ she said simply, but a little hastily. ‘What have you been doing since—since then ?’

‘It’s strange how everybody at Lindenheim has turned out just opposite to what



they were to be—at least most of them. You were great friends with Lotte; do you ever hear of her now? I left you at Lindenheim, you know, and have dropped out of the profession; so I'm behind the age.'

'I haven't heard of Lotte since she married.'

'Lotte married! Poor fellow! Unless he doesn't care to hear his own talking. How odd it always sounds to hear of a Lindenheimer marrying. Who is he?'

'She married Herr Caspar, two years after I came home.'

'No! What, the genius whom you scolded me about by moonlight? Lotte and Herr Caspar! Surely it is too absurd. Why, she hated the very sight of him. But perhaps she married him in order to make him have his hair cut. No—I don't pity him; I pity her.'

'They are doing well, I believe. When Lotte wrote last they were in New York, and he was composing an opera bouffe, for a theatre.'

'Great Heaven! He, who was to be a second Mendelssohn, who never heard of a joke! And Lotte?'

‘She does nothing now.’

‘Mends the stockings, I suppose. And Lucas has turned stockbroker, and I painter, and Ilma—well, the less said of her the better—and you are at Deepweald. Which way are you going now? I’ve got nothing to do here, and I’d rather have a chat with you about old times than see the cathedral.’

He was really thinking about the old times; and so, as often happens, took no notice of what had made him think of them. It may safely be said that for years past that walk to Waaren, and the protecting friendship for Celia that had come of it and had endured so long as he remained at Lindenheim, had been nothing more to him than the merest phantom of a memory, giving perfume to a thousand others indeed, but otherwise lost among them. A man who has given a bunch of violets to every girl at Lindenheim, each after each, does not treasure the recollection of one gift rather than another. Celia had not stopped walking as he spoke, and had been walking beside him with some air of the old shyness, just a little demure and mouselike, in place of the old frank timidity,

to remind him that she was not quite the same Celia; and now that he looked at her again he saw that she looked gravely happy.

‘I am going to Mrs. Gaveston’s.’

‘Mrs. Gaveston? No relation to my friend the curate of St. Anselm’s at Deepweald?’

‘She is Mr. Gaveston’s wife.’

‘Indeed? And how far is St. Anselm’s? I hope it is a long way.’

‘Only the end of that street. You can see the spire.’

‘Well, there are more ways of getting to a place than the straight one. Are there no other ways of reaching Mrs. Gaveston than down that street and no other? Just think, Fräulein Celia—I haven’t seen you for six years.’

‘I’m afraid I must go that way and no other. I shall be late else.’

‘Oh, call on her some other day.’

‘I have a lesson to give her.’

‘You give lessons—here?’

‘Yes. That is my life. I was never ambitious, you know.’

He glanced at her again. What made

him look at her now was a composed way she had acquired of speaking that was altogether new. He began rather to miss the old shyness. He regretted rather that he had let the thread of her life go so completely out of his fingers that he could not quite identify her with the Celia whom he was now recalling more and more. He would have liked her to remain the same. Nobody likes to go home after a long absence to find a change, if it be but no more than a new barn. He wanted to ask if her father was still the organist, but her dark clothes made him refrain. And, though he might jest over the fortunes of their fellow-students in general, he did not like to find in a country music-mistress, without ambition, her who, when he left Lindenheim, was to be the very star of them all.


‘Well, I’ll walk with you as far as the Gavestons’, and then we’ll meet again before I leave this part of the world.’

He hoped she would have told him where he might call on her; and she was silent for a minute, as if making up her mind. But no invitation came.

‘I hope so,’ she said. ‘But here is the Gavestons’. Good-bye!’

He would not have thought her eager to get rid of him, if he had known Deepweald. He was just now full of Lindenheim, and, for the moment, was Herr Walter walking down the Gansgasse with Fräulein Celia—not Mr. Gordon walking with Miss March in West Street, Deepweald. And for a young lady to be walking at that hour, in full sunlight, with a strange young man, was a breach of etiquette that the most innocent were bound to know, and the most reckless to recognise.

But the time still hung on his hands—it was still a good two hours before he was to meet Lord Quorne. And he was getting hungry too, and wondered whether the curate lunched or dined at one. Finally, after another lounge, during which Lindenheim shared his thoughts—if such they could be called—with Clari, he found himself back in West Street, and rang at Gaveston’s bell. There was surely no reason why he should not call on his old college friend, and every reason why he should learn something about



Clari, who interested him more than the cathedral after all.

Mr. Gaveston was not at home, but Mrs. Gaveston was. All the better. Walter Gordon was not troubled with shyness of a curate's wife, and sent in his card. He had allowed ample time for a singing-lesson to be over, and was received in the parlour by a fresh-looking young lady, not of the pattern precisely of which he would have expected to find Mrs. Reginald Gaveston, provincial in bearing, but pleasant enough to look upon.

'I'm sorry I've found your husband out. He's an old college friend of mine—perhaps you've heard of his meeting me the other day? I'm staying at Hinchford.'

This he said, not by way of boast, but of the introduction that instinct told him would pass best with Mrs. Gaveston.

'Oh dear! And so am I—so sorry. Mr. Gaveston will be, I mean. Of course, I'm glad to see any of his friends, or of Lord Quorne's—his cousin, you know.'

'I knew him at Oxford, and I meant to call and be introduced to Mrs. Gaveston be-

fore leaving. He won't mind my introducing myself, I dare say.'

'Oh no—and now you're here, you'll take a glass of wine. I hope Lady Quorne is well?'

'Quite—thank you.'

'Is this your first visit to Deepweald, Mr. Gordon? Of course you've seen the cathedral? I wish Mr. Gaveston had been at home—he'd have shown it to you better than the vergers, and our own church, St. Anselm's.'

'No—I've not been to the cathedral yet. I should like to go when there's a performance—service, I mean. By-the-way, who is the organist here?'

'The organist? Mr. March. I suppose you are musical? Mr. March is a very wonderful musician, I believe. His daughter studied on the Continent, and I take lessons of her, poor girl. I used to learn of Mr. March himself before I was married. But of course that's all over now, and it's a charity, as well as an advantage, to do all one can for poor Celia March, I'm sure.'

Walter was getting to the point sooner than he expected, and without any bush-

beating that might have been necessary to give his visit the air of an unadulterated compliment to the wife of his friend. But what could have happened to the ex-star of Lindenheim, that she should be called 'poor' by the wife of a Reginald Gaveston?

'Are they badly off, then?' he asked, as if out of polite but disinterested curiosity.

'Don't you know?'

'I'm a stranger to Deepweald, you must remember.'

'Ah, of course. Poor Celia does all she can—I must say that for her—and though she isn't very bright, she has been on the Continent, which of course is something. But Mr. March always was such a strange creature. They say he used to beat her, but that I never quite believed, or they wouldn't have thought so much of him at the Palace. But that's all over now. There'll have to be a new organist before long, and John March never saved a penny, that I can swear to. You never saw, Mr. Gordon, such gowns as Celia used to wear.'

'You mean her father spent all his money on her clothes?'



‘If he had—but there’s no good raking up bygones. Yes, there’ll have to be a new organist before long; and I’m sorry, for what they’ll do I don’t know.’

‘Why? Are they so poor? Do you mean the father is out of his mind?’

‘I’m afraid he was always a little that way. But I don’t know that would make much difference.’

‘Misconduct?’

‘Oh no. I’m sure I never said that. He’s Deaf—that’s the matter. And enough too.’

END OF VOL. I.







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